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QUEEN ELIZABETH  
AND  
EARL LEICESTER

INGLISFIELD







QUEEN ELIZABETH AND  
EARL LEICESTER.

A Drama in Five Acts.

BY  
WALTER INGLISFIELD.

LONDON :  
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.  
1894.



THIS PLAY

Is respectfully dedicated

TO

RICHARD J. MIDDLETON, ESQ., F.I. INST., ETC.



QUEEN ELIZABETH AND EARL LEICESTER.

## Dramatis Personæ.

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QUEEN ELIZABETH.

THE EARL OF LEICESTER.

BURLEIGH, *Prime Minister.*

CHARLES IX., *King of France.*

DUC D'ALENÇON.

LA MOTTE FÉNELON, *French Ambassador.*

BISHOP AYLMER.

SIR CHARLES HATTON, *Vice-Chamberlain.*

THE EARL OF SUSSEX, *Lord Chamberlain.*

SIR THOMAS SMITH, *Ambassador at the French Court.*

WALSINGHAM, *Ambassador at the French Court.*

LORD LINCOLN.

SIR JOHN MELVILLE.

SIR THOMAS MOLE.

WHITLEY, *Hatton's servant.*

MURDERER.

CATHERINE DE MEDICIS.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

KATE ASHLEY.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

FRANCES HOWARD.

LADY LENNOX.

LADY FREEZE.

*Courtiers, Ministers, Gentlemen, Citizens, etc.*

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A street in London.*

*Enter* EARL OF SUSSEX *and* BURLEIGH.

SUSSEX.

Hast thou no power to bend her will ?

BURLEIGH.

'Twere easier to bend an iron rod  
Than her too stubborn will. I know no trick  
That could accomplish it. The more one tries  
The stubbornner she is ; and gentle counsel  
She changes to entreaty on our knees  
That we may keep our heads.

SUSSEX.

She angers me !

BURLEIGH.

Nay, be not angry, Sussex.

SUSSEX.

Not angry !

My God, her stubborn will incites our anger.

BURLEIGH.

Hsh !

If anyone should hear thee say such words,  
I would not give a snapping for thy life.

SUSSEX.

My life !

Dost call this life, ruled by a woman's whims,  
And we've no power to ope our mouths and say,  
'This shall be' or 'That shall not be' ? 'Tis not  
A manly life to hold a silent tongue,  
And let a foolish woman have her way.  
I'll be a man and utter what I think,  
E'en if I lose my head.

BURLEIGH.

Thou art too rash.

I would advise thee put a curb upon  
Thy tongue, and blunt thy anger, my good lord.  
The keenest knife needs carefulest handling.

SUSSEX.

What use is any knife that's blunt ? We'd be  
In sorry plight, my friend, if we possessed  
No grinding stones.

BURLEIGH.

Ah, well !

If thou dost know what's best for thee I'll hold  
My tongue. I'd give my life if I could force  
The queen to marry.

SUSSEX.

She must.

If without issue she should die, then woe  
To England and our blessed Church ! Damned  
Rome  
Would conquer and enslave us all.

BURLEIGH.

Methinks that Leicester is the cause of all  
This obstinacy.

SUSSEX.

Oh, damn the hypocrite !  
He's England's curse and scourge.

BURLEIGH.

Alas !

[*Exeunt* SUSSEX and BURLEIGH.]

*Enter* TWO GENTLEMEN, *in conversation.*

1ST GENT.

If she should die, and leave no heir, the crown  
Would then revert to Mary, Queen of Scots,  
A Roman Catholic, and we should see

6 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

The bloody days of Mary's reign once more.  
O think, my friend, what storm would burst upon  
Our country, should our gracious majesty  
Refuse to marry !

2ND GENT.

I see it all,  
And sorrow heavily. 'Twere better she  
Should marry Leicester than not wed at all.

1ST GENT.

God forbid !  
I'd rather be enslaved to Rome than be  
A subject to so vile and mean a king.  
I marvel much her majesty can love  
A wretch so worthless.

2ND GENT.

She loves his handsome face  
And graceful form.

1ST GENT.

Which proves she is a woman, friend, of which  
So many are in grievous doubt. I would  
To God she were less true a woman, we  
Might live in more security than on  
Deceitful whims.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Westminster: a private apartment in the Palace.*

*Enter QUEEN ELIZABETH alone.*

They'd force me marry, would they? They would  
yoke

My queenly dignities with wifely cares?

God's death! I'll cure them. A husband! 'Sblood!

I'll husband them, and wife them, too! I'm placed

Above all men, and were a fool to share

My power with any masculine thing they call

A man! I'll let no husband play the king

O'er me. I know their real designs, but will

Outwit them all. (*A pause*)

And yet I would I were

A wife. With all its power and dignities,

With all its pomp, and show, and splendour, 'tis

But hollow mockery. I feed on naught

But husks. I envy frequently the wives

Of artisans. Though they are poor and mean,

They have their husbands' and their children's  
love.

I am no mother to my subjects, so

They cannot love me with sweet children's love.

I would I knew a deeper love. I am

No longer young, but getting old and staid,

So cannot hope to find a husband who

8 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Would love me for myself. I'd give my crown  
For such a love.

*Enter LEICESTER.*

What! thou rude man! wouldst dare to enter  
here?

Go from my presence, or thy head shall pay  
The penalty of thy rash act.

LEICESTER (*kneeling*).

Pray pardon, most beloved majesty,  
And be not angry with me, for 'twas love  
That brought my footsteps close to thee. I know,  
Indeed, thou'rt in no happy mood, and that  
Hath grieved me more than words can say. I  
would

That thou wouldst let me share thy grief. I long  
To soothe it with the love I have for thee.  
Pray, think, beloved majesty, what pain  
It gives to me, what poignant misery,  
To know thou art not happy. There's no joy  
For me when there is none for thee. I know  
What risk I run by thus intruding here;  
But love hath blinded me, and given me strength  
To place my life in jeopardy.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Leicester, thou'rt a skilful man, and know'st  
Too well where my great weakness lies. 'Tis thou

Alone who canst with safety run the risk  
Of my displeasure, but e'en thou canst go  
Too far. I warn thee, let this be thy last  
Attempt. Another time I shall not be  
So quickly soothed. Pray go, and flatter thee  
That I have pardoned thy offence, and with  
Content that I am far from suffering  
What hath aroused thy fears.

LEICESTER.

Most gracious majesty, I give thee thanks.  
I'm most unworthy thy great gentleness,  
And thy too ready pardoning. It will  
But strengthen my great love for thee, and stir  
My zeal to serve thee faithfully.  
[Exit LEICESTER.]

ELIZABETH.

Methinks there's one who hath true love for me.  
And I love him. Yea, I would marry him  
If I could face the storm that then would burst  
And rage all o'er the land. Ofttimes I feel  
My love would give me strength; and then I  
doubt,  
And fear o'ermasters me. My crown is set  
With many thorns, nor doth its splendour numb  
The pain of wearing it. I'm absolute?  
I have, indeed, the power o'er life and death.

10 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

But not the power to gain that happiness  
Which those who fear me may enjoy. I am  
More pitiable than they. I have no power  
To crush their greatest joys, yet they have means  
To make me lead a joyless life, and this  
They use relentlessly. They'd urge me wed  
A man I do not love! They shall not. Nay,  
They shall not. They shall know that though I  
be

A woman and a queen, I have a will  
That shall defeat their plans.

[*Exit ELIZABETH.*

SCENE III.—*The same. A room of state in the Palace. Lords spiritual and temporal, ministers, courtiers, etc., await in groups for the Queen. The throne at one end. LORD SUSSEX and SIR CHARLES HATTON are heard conversing.*

SUSSEX.

Well, Hatton, why this grieving look?

HATTON.

I see dark clouds ahead. I fear they'll burst  
And injure us.

SUSSEX.

I see them, too.  
There's much to spoil in this assembly here.

*Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester* 11

HATTON.

Some fragile, dainty bodies, who can stand  
But little stress of storm.

SUSSEX.

Mark Burleigh there.  
He hath a drooping look.

HATTON.

Poor man !  
He hath most weighty cares to bend his eyes.

SUSSEX.

Dost think she'll wed Anjou ?

HATTON.

I cannot tell.  
No man has skill to read her changing mind.

SUSSEX.

He is a worthy match for her, methinks.  
He's handsome, young, well-knit in form, and  
bold.

HATTON.

In England many are more worthy her.

*(There is now a stir amongst the assembly as the Queen  
is seen to enter with her attendants. She seats  
herself on the throne.)*

ELIZABETH.

What is the meaning of this audience?  
 Lord Bishop, I do bid thee speak, for thou  
 Shouldst have a tend'rer conscience. I behold  
 Sheep's clothing here amongst the rest.

AYLMER.

Beloved and most gracious sovereign,  
 We, thy most humble subjects, deign to pray,  
 By aid of God's most holy grace, that thou  
 Wouldst in thy queenly wisdom—for, indeed,  
 Thou art most wise above all queens that e'er  
 Have reigned—think it now time to wed.

ELIZABETH.

Ha !

AYLMER.

Think not, most gracious majesty, that we  
 Presume, and would dictate to thee. I swear  
 By God's most Holy Writ we do it out  
 Of love for thee and for the Church of which  
 Thou art the worthy head. Thy enemies  
 Rejoice in thy virginity. If thou  
 Wouldst marry, it would crush their fondest hopes,  
 And take their strength away. Think, mighty  
     queen,  
 Of that great empire thou dost rule, whose name  
 Is known, whose power is felt, the wide world o'er.

To thee it owes its mightiness ; 'tis thou  
Who keep'st intact the sandy atoms which  
Compose it, and which could with ease be rent  
Asunder by thy death.

ELIZABETH.

'Sblood !

Speak not to me of death. If thou wouldst have  
Me listen to thy speech, I counsel thee  
To preach no funeral harangue.

AYLMER.

I crave thy pardon, gracious majesty.

ELIZABETH.

I pardon thee  
With right good will. Thou art an honest man,  
But art the dupe of others who have used  
Thy mouth to speak their thoughts. I know their  
minds.

They would coerce me into marriage. Ha !  
They think 'twould be more manly to obey  
A king. They like no woman rule. They would  
Forget abroad who governs them at home.  
They like it not to take commands from one  
Whom they regard inferior to themselves.

SUSSEX (*aside to HATTON*).

She fishes well.

HATTON (*aside to SUSSEX*).

The holy priest doth recognise the bait.  
He's tasted it aforetime.

AYLMER.

Nay, mighty queen,  
We do rejoice, and thank our God that He  
Hath sent from heaven a queen so wise and  
gentle,  
So fair and beautiful, whose piety  
Hath been a good example to us all.  
No king could be so fit to govern us.  
'Tis we who show no worthiness to be  
The subjects of so great a queen. If thrones  
Are only made secure if built upon  
A nation's love and gratitude, then thine  
Need never fear the fiercest storm. We have  
For thee the veneration which is due  
To those most wise. Then, think not, gracious  
madam,  
We scorn thee or thy government, and wish  
To have a king. Nay! nay! God knows it is  
Not so. Thou doest us a grievous wrong.  
We'd have thee wed, indeed, for thine own sake,  
And for thy truer happiness.

ELIZABETH.

I thank thee, my good lord. Thou speakest well.  
Thou hast a tongue most eloquent. But I  
Would bid thee cease, not tire thyself, and store  
Thy eloquence for thy professional work.

*[Exeunt Queen and attendants.]*

SCENE IV.—*Outside the Palace.*

*Enter LEICESTER and BURLEIGH.*

LEICESTER.

I tell thee she will marry none but me.  
I know her mind on this too well to fear  
She'll wed a foreigner. I swear by Heaven  
She shall not marry any Duc d'Anjou.  
I tell thee, Burleigh, I shall yet be king,  
And woe to my sworn enemies ! Methinks  
They'll tremble then and feel their heads quite  
loose.

BURLEIGH.

Thou know'st I am no enemy of thine.

LEICESTER.

Thou art too sly, my lord,  
And hast too great a fondness for thy head,

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And for the power thou wield'st. But some are  
rash,

And show their hasty tempers and their spleen ;  
But I will trip them up, by God !

[*Exeunt both.*

*Enter SUSSEX and HATTON.*

SUSSEX.

I say she must be saved. She doth refuse  
To save herself, so we must do it.

HATTON.

What ! save her when the wolf is at her throat ?

SUSSEX.

Yea, even then.

HATTON.

But she will cling to it. She likes its bite.  
To-day a man of courage dared to say  
She sought her death, yet she insulted him.  
How shall we save her, then ?

SUSSEX.

I see a way.

She was not in a happy mood to-day.  
The bishop's weighty words will not be lost,  
I'll warrant thee. She'll deeply ponder them.

HATTON.

Pray God she will  
And find them curing medicine.

*Re-enter LEICESTER alone.*

SUSSEX.

Here comes the traitor. (*To LEICESTER*) Thou  
art the cause,  
Detested hypocrite, why she hath scorned  
Our bishop's holy words. Thou art the cause  
Of her displeasure—thou, whose damned conceit  
Would have her for thyself.

LEICESTER.

Be calm, my lord.  
This haughty anger is most ill-advised.  
I thought thou wert a wiser man. Thou hast  
Not wisdom e'en to save thy head.

SUSSEX.

Nor hadst thy father, upstart, and the wisdom  
Which he did lack, which lopped his head, his  
son  
Hath well inherited. Thy father was  
A fool, but thou'rt a heartless knave.

LEICESTER.

But yet a knave too much for Sussex. Ha !

SUSSEX.

Wilt thou dare imitate our gracious queen !  
Thou art not fit to tie her blessed shoes.

LEICESTER.

But fit to be her husband, so she thinks.

SUSSEX.

Thou villain ! cur !

LEICESTER.

My lord will rue these hasty words.  
I bear thee no ill-will. My happiness  
Hath eased my temper, sir.

SUSSEX.

I'd like to crack thy swollen head.

[*Exit* LEICESTER.]

HATTON.

He speaks the truth.  
Thou art too hasty, my good lord. We cannot  
Defeat the devil by high words. Our wrath  
Is oft the fire with which he tortures us.

SUSSEX.

Oh, damn the cur !  
Shall such a villain wed our noble queen ?  
I'll kill him first. Yea, with my life I'll try  
To save my country and my queen.

[*Excunt both.*]

SCENE V.—*Room in the house of the COUNTESS OF ESSEX. The COUNTESS discovered alone.*

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

My lord is late,  
An hour beyond his time. Why should I feel  
This strange disquietude? I love him, yea,  
With all my heart, but can I be his wife?  
The queen doth love him, too, and I am sure  
Would marry Dudley if she dared. If she  
But knew we have these secret interviews  
Nor he nor I would be alive a day. It is,  
I fear, the risk we run that makes me feel  
This dread.

*Enter LEICESTER disguised.*

Ah, thou art come! Thou'rt late.

*(He kisses her.)*

LEICESTER.

And didst thou fear I would not come?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Methought

Thou wast detained elsewhere.

LEICESTER.

Ha! ha!

*(He caresses her.)*

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Be not so jealous, love. 'Twas not the queen  
Who made me late, but Sussex, that proud pup,  
Did bark at me and danced about my heels.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Methinks he'll trip thee up some day.

LEICESTER.

Not till I kick him first.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

What makes him hate thee so ?

LEICESTER.

'Tis jealousy,  
And from the cause that makes thee jealous.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

He thinks thou'lt be above him ?

LEICESTER.

Methinks I am already.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

He could not bide thee king.

LEICESTER.

Nor couldst thou.  
He thinks I'll wed the queen. That is thy fear,  
So why dost thou not hate me, too ?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Because thou lov'st me, but thou hast no love  
For him. Yet sometimes I'm in grievous doubt  
Thou lov'st her best.

LEICESTER.

Come ! come !  
Thou art more beautiful, and hast a heart  
More soft, a disposition far more sweet.  
Thou art a woman, she is more a man  
Than many men. I oftentimes doubt her sex,  
So masculine is she at times. 'Tis thou,  
Alone, I love. The fairest in the land  
Art thou. To think that I would choose the  
stone  
Uncut, when I may have the polished gem !

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Thou couldst be tempted to exchange if it  
Were given with a crown.

LEICESTER.

Fear not.  
She will not marry me. I said she has  
The courage of a man, but even she  
Would dread to face her subjects' scorn and  
wrath.  
'Tis wise of me to humour her. I know

22 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

She's in my power, and I were a fool  
To make her free and thus enslave myself.  
So thou and I must rest content awhile  
To love and wed in secrecy.

SCENE VI.—*Guest-room in the house of the COUN-  
TESS OF SHREWSBURY. Guests assembled.*

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Now, Lady Lennox, what hast thou to say?  
Thou art a near relation of the queen,  
And so should know her secret acts.

LADY LENNOX.

Alas! that I were not so near in blood!  
She fears and hates her kin, and seeks excuse  
To thrust them into prison, as she did me.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Come! come!

No sighing over that. Thou'rt free, and not  
In prison, wench, nor would she dare again  
To put thee there. So speak thy mind, and say  
If this be true of her.

LADY LENNOX.

Alas!

How should I know? I'm never near the court

To hear the gossip spoken there. Besides,  
She never would confess to such a deed  
To anyone.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

I am convinced 'tis true.  
She's done in public what doth not become  
The lowest woman, let alone a queen,  
So I am sure in secrecy, with such  
A man, her modesty would not restrain  
Her acts.

*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON.

Here comes the man who can confirm the story.

HATTON.

What is the latest riddle, pray? Sweet ladies,  
If I can solve it I'm at your commands.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Without parade, it is that Leicester was  
Observed to come from out the queen's own  
room,  
Where no one is allowed to go but she.

HATTON.

Great God!

And is it come to this? That he was there  
To no good purpose is to be inferred,

But would the queen give countenance to his  
 Deep vice, she who doth set herself to be  
 A type of chaste virginity? Nay, nay,  
 It cannot be. It is not true. How didst  
 Thou hear of this?

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Thou need'st must guess.  
 My ears would not have heard it had there been  
 No cause for it. They are not blind at court,  
 Nor are they fools, although her majesty  
 May think them so.

HATTON.

But they are idle gossipers, and fond  
 Of tattle. They've invented this to serve  
 Some purpose of their own. Perchance they  
     have  
 Some spite against the queen, or, likelier,  
 Against the villain Leicester, for who doth  
 Not hate this man? The queen is innocent.  
 'Twas he who forced himself into her presence,  
 For he is bold and bad enough. No doubt,  
 Through love for him she's hushed it up. She is,  
 I'll warrant thee, a chaste and virtuous queen.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Ah! Sir Christopher,  
 If all had faith in her as thou, she'd have

A merry time of it. I am convinced,  
From what I know of woman and the queen,  
That she is not so virtuous as she  
Would seem to be. My Lady Freeze doth share  
My thoughts? (*Turns to her.*)

LADY FREEZE.

Yea, indeed  
I could not swear the queen was virtuous.  
I would not be so vile a hypocrite.  
The woman who hath secret talks with such  
A man as Leicester, though she be a queen,  
Must needs give way to overpow'ring lust.  
That is the nature of their love.

*Enter* BURLEIGH.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Ha! ha!  
No longer shall we be in doubt. Here comes  
A man who can enlighten us.

BURLEIGH.

Yea! yea!  
I can enlighten ye. I have some news  
Which will rejoice ye all.

COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

Pray tell it us.

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BURLEIGH.

The queen hath sent a letter to the duke  
To say she will not marry him. So all  
Is o'er. Our efforts are in vain, and we  
Must cringe to Leicester's insolence.

HATTON.

Not I.

I will defy him ; yea, by God, I will.

BURLEIGH.

We all, with safety, may defy him here ;  
But in his presence, Chris ?

HATTON.

I will defy him to his face. I hate  
The cur, and can no longer bear his yelps.

LADY FREEZE.

But what about her majesty, who loves  
Him so ? Thou canst not injure him, if he  
Should screen himself behind her back. Thou  
wouldst  
Not sneer at him, but at the queen, and she  
Would frown on thee, to thy sore grief.

HATTON.

I care not for the queen.  
If she will seek the ruin of herself

And country, spite of sage advice, then she  
Must needs incur the scorn of all.

LADY FREEZE.

Tut !

Thou know'st her frown hath often made thee ill.  
Thou'rt ne'er so happy as when she doth smile  
On thee. Thy joyous face would make us think  
'Twas pleasant summer time.

HATTON.

Thou hast a biting tongue, my Lady Freeze.  
So sharp a weapon should be used with mercy.

LADY FREEZE.

Nay, nay.

It is the only weapon we possess,  
And that is weak compared with man's great  
strength  
Of body, which is used relentlessly  
On us, to keep us in our place, as he  
Is wont to say. My counsel to my sex  
Is this: Until your husband shows ye by  
Example how ye should be merciful,  
Treat him with harshness. It will be his cure.

BURLEIGH.

Pray, cease this wrangle.

It doth not suit the serious times in which  
We live. 'Twere nobler if we set our minds  
To work to save our country and our queen.  
We're all like sheep within a fold. There's in  
Our midst a sly and ravenous wolf, who doth  
Disturb our peace. He hath his greedy eye  
Upon our shepherd, whom he hath deceived  
By conduct meek. It is our duty, then,  
To watch untiringly his movements, lest  
He fall on her and ruin all.

## ACT II.

SCENE I. — *Apartment in Westminster Palace.*

ELIZABETH and KATE ASHLEY *discovered.*

ELIZABETH.

I would that I were married, Kate. Methinks  
It is a happier life to lead than is  
The solitude of barren singleness.  
I oft repent me, wench, that I refused  
The noble kings who would have married me.  
I oft have cried myself to sleep, and then  
Have dreamt of happiness, to wake again  
To cold and stern reality. Ah, Kate,  
Be glad thou dost not wear a crown. It is  
A weighty ornament; yea, oftentimes  
A crushing burden unto me. I'd feel  
So free if it were shared by one who had  
True love for me. But I am getting old,  
I know, and have already passed the age  
For men to fall in love with me.

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, child,  
Thou art not old. Thou'rt in the prime of life.  
I'll warrant me no one could guess thy age,  
So young and fresh thou look'st. I'll warrant me,  
If thou wouldst only favour them and draw  
Them on, that many young ones would be pleased  
To marry thee.

ELIZABETH.

Dost think so, Kate?

KATE ASHLEY.

'Tis true.  
I were most blind to question it.

ELIZABETH.

Am I good-looking, Kate?

KATE ASHLEY.

Thy beauty is much envied, child. I know  
That there are many, even in this court,  
Who pride themselves upon their loveliness,  
But yet confess, when thou art by, thou dost  
Eclipse them all. Thou'rt like the sun, which  
doth  
Outshine the moon and stars, and pales their  
light.

ELIZABETH.

Have they confessed so much ?

KATE ASHLEY.

Could they confess aught else ?

ELIZABETH.

I had my charms at one time, Kate.

KATE ASHLEY.

When thou wert young no maiden in the land  
Was half so beautiful. Before thou worest  
A crown thou hadst a queenly majesty.  
Thou wert a picture which made glad the eye,  
And thrilled the heart to gaze upon. Thy mind  
Is not less powerful and keen than is  
Thy body beautiful. Thou art the gift  
Of bounteous God, who's fashioned thee a queen  
Most perfectly.

ELIZABETH.

Sweet Kate !

To thee I owe a debt which I can ne'er  
Repay. Had it not been for thee, my mind  
Would long ago have lost its vigour.

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, child.

The soil in which the seeds are sown must be  
Quite suitable, or else the seeds will die.

ELIZABETH.

Those were my happiest days, my wench, when I  
Would sit and learn the lessons thou didst teach.  
I would those happy hours would come again.  
Nay, let me cast aside my cares, and let  
Me be thy pupil o'er again.

KATE ASHLEY.

With all my heart.

ELIZABETH.

Now, Kate,  
Let's talk of flowers. Thou know'st my love for  
them  
Is deep. How glorious looks this rose! Can  
aught  
Be lovelier?

KATE ASHLEY.

Naught, child.

ELIZABETH.

How old is it,  
As thou wouldst think?

KATE ASHLEY.

But very young.

ELIZABETH.

Some years?

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, child.

A rose's life is counted by the hours.

ELIZABETH.

To-morrow, then, 'twill be near death?

KATE ASHLEY.

Yea.

ELIZABETH.

Like all things on this earth, true loveliness  
Is only given to youth?

KATE ASHLEY.

'Tis sadly true.

ELIZABETH.

As age creeps on that beauty fades?

KATE ASHLEY.

True.

ELIZABETH.

How like are flowers to human beings, Kate!

KATE ASHLEY.

They're very like.

34 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

ELIZABETH.

Youth is the time of beauty, but old age  
The time of ugliness ?

KATE ASHLEY.

I would it were not so.

ELIZABETH.

It is, my wench ?

KATE ASHLEY.

Yea ; it is.

ELIZABETH.

Then I am ugly, Kate, for I am old ?

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, nay.

ELIZABETH.

Thou saidst that ugliness did come with age.

KATE ASHLEY.

I did ?

ELIZABETH.

Thou didst most solemnly.

KATE ASHLEY.

But there are cases known when nature's laws  
Have been reversed. I've heard of miracles.

ELIZABETH.

But not in our time, Kate.

KATE ASHLEY.

In my time, child. Thou art a miracle.  
Besides, thou art not old, but in the prime  
Of life. Thou art but thirty-nine, but none  
Would guess that thou wert twenty-nine.

ELIZABETH.

But thou wilt let them know my age?

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, never child.

I'd cut my tongue out first.

[*Exeunt both.*]

SCENE II. — *A street in London. Enter TWO GENTLEMEN in conversation.*

1ST GENT.

Come, tell me what thou knowest.

2ND GENT.

There's naught to tell. The story can be told  
in briefest language.

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1ST GENT.

But thou art far too brief, for thou dost use no words at all.

2ND GENT.

Nay, nay. I've clothed it in the language it doth need.

1ST GENT.

Well, well, let's see. Thou saidst the queen had quarrelled with her lover Leicester. So far so good, but there thou stay'st. What was the cause of it? What hath he done to raise her ire?

2ND GENT.

How could I tell thee if I knew it not? 'Tis known he's in disgrace, but why, 'tis known to none.

1ST GENT.

'Tis strange! Then it must be some secret act of his.

2ND GENT.

It may have been a public one for aught the world doth know.

1ST GENT.

How doth he seem?

2ND GENT.

'Tis said he takes it very ill. It is a blow which hath quite bent his head, so now, instead of gazing at high heaven, he doth regard the earth as one that loves it.

1ST GENT.

How great a change! Methought he scorned the earth, and did despise it e'en to walk upon.

2ND GENT.

Yea, friend, our necks are frail. The strongest can't support the head for long which ever gazes at high heaven. Fatigue doth bend it down that it may rest awhile.

1ST GENT.

He'll hold it up again, I fear.

2ND GENT.

Pray God, 'tis permanently bent!

[*Exeunt* GENTLEMEN.]

*Enter* SUSSEX and SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON *in conversation.*

SUSSEX.

I tell thee, Chris, the queen is tired of him.  
I'm not surprised. His arrogance would tire

And would outrage far gentler sovereigns  
Than mighty Bess. I'm in a happier mood  
To-day than I have been for years.

HATTON.

I would I were.  
I greatly fear she will o'erlook his fault,  
Whate'er it is, and will forgive him.

SUSSEX.

Ah ! never fear.  
Rest certain she hath done with him. I know  
Her nature far too well to fear she will  
Restore him to her favour. Thou couldst not  
Have marked the frown with which she looked  
at him  
To-day. That is a cloud which ever will  
In future darken Leicester's path. Yea, more,  
'Twill threaten many certain storms.

HATTON.

I would I had thy sanguine temper, Sussex.

SUSSEX.

My nature is no sanguine one, but when  
I see a thing I can believe my eyes.

*Enter* SIR JOHN MELVILLE, BURLEIGH, and  
LINCOLN.

SUSSEX.

Well met, my happy friends! Thy faces look  
Most wondrous bright to-day.

MELVILLE.

Because the sun doth shine, my lord.

SUSSEX.

But not on all, Sir John.  
It hath its dark side, too. *(They laugh.)*

MELVILLE.

Thou'rt in a merry mood to-day.

SUSSEX.

There's cause for it.  
Art thou not merry too?

MELVILLE.

Most merry, friend.  
I would these happy times were not so rare.

SUSSEX.

That is their great defect.

*Enter* LEICESTER, *looking downcast. They all frown*  
*on him.*

SUSSEX *(as he passes)*.

Alas! crestfallen quite.

*(LEICESTER turns and scowls at SUSSEX.)*

40 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

LEICESTER.

There was a time when my Lord Sussex would  
Have bitten out his tongue than said such words.

SUSSEX.

Liar!

When did I show that I feared thee?

LEICESTER (*turning to the others*).

Ye all will rue this day.

[*Exit* LEICESTER.]

SUSSEX.

Come, friends, let's join in feast, to celebrate  
This happy day.

[*Excunt all.*]

SCENE III. — *France. A room in the Palace.*

*Enter CATHERINE DE MEDICIS, alone.*

I cannot let so fair a country slip  
From out my grasp. Shall I be foiled? Nay,  
shall

This paltry Queen of England crush my hopes?  
Shall Catherine de Medicis, the queen  
Of mighty France, whom e'en the Pope doth fear,  
Be conquered by a giddy girl? Nay, God!  
Thou didst not bring me in the world for that.

Thou'lt give me England yet. Thou'lt let me  
bring

So heretic a nation back to Thee,  
And to Thy own true Church. Thou'lt let her be  
Espoused to France and governed by those  
kings

Who are the bulwarks of the Catholic faith,  
The enemies of heresy. She hath  
Refused two sons of mine, whom I held out  
As worthy baits. I have a younger son,  
Who, though he be deformed in body, is  
A worthy match for her; yea, worthy also  
To rule a nation full of clowns and boors.  
I'll make her marry him. I know a way  
To cure her obstinacy.

*Enter* KING CHARLES IX.

Well, son?

CHARLES.

Well, mother!

CATHERINE.

What means this grieving mood?

CHARLES.

Is there not grievous cause for it?

CATHERINE.

Nay.

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CHARLES.

Nay?

CATHERINE.

Nay, I say;

There is no grievous cause for it.

CHARLES.

Not ruinous and useless wars, whereby  
We see our country's glory fade?

CATHERINE.

These things are paltry, child.

CHARLES.

Nay, do not jest.

Pray be more serious.

CATHERINE.

I am most serious.

CHARLES.

Although I know thee well, I cannot guess  
What thou dost mean.

CATHERINE.

Then listen, boy.

Why need we fear our enemies when we  
Have England on our side?

CHARLES.

This is but jesting.

Why, England is our greatest enemy.

'Tis she who long hath dealt us deadly blows ;

Nay, but for her all Europe would be ours.

CATHERINE.

We'll conquer Europe yet,

And England shall assist us.

CHARLES.

Nay, mother,

Thou knowst there is no ground for such high  
hopes.

CATHERINE.

I have a son that shall rule England yet !

CHARLES.

Pray how ?

CATHERINE.

Elizabeth shall be his wife.

CHARLES.

Which son ?

CATHERINE.

Thy brother, Alençon.

CHARLES.

She'll never wed so ill-deformed a man.  
 She hath refused to marry handsome men,  
 Most powerful kings, and I am certain she  
 Would scorn an ill-assorted match. Nay, more,  
 She'd feel insulted, and would seek revenge.  
 'Twould bring a greater breach between us, which  
 No effort on our part would ever bridge.  
 It cannot be.

CATHERINE.

I say it shall be.  
 She need not know of his great ugliness.  
 If there are any likely to impart  
 To her the truth, then gold can silence them.  
 Nay, more, it shall be made to hide thy brother's  
 Deformity, and make him look a man  
 Of handsome and attractive form. Ah, gold  
 Will tinsel o'er and change to brilliancy  
 The coarsest things. On it I will rely  
 For sure success.

CHARLES.

The secret will leak out, and we are damned.

CATHERINE.

'Tis worth the trial, thou'lt confess, and if  
 It fails there's naught will damn us, son.

CHARLES.

I'll leave it all to thee.

Thou art a clever woman, far too deep  
For man to fathom thee, or woman, either.  
Thou hast done wondrous things ere now, and  
hast,  
No doubt, the faculty to do them still.

CATHERINE.

I have the will  
To do what nature can. I cannot suffer  
Defeat from anyone, and least of all  
From woman.

[*Exeunt both.*]

SCENE IV.—*London. An apartment in the Queen's  
Palace.*

*Enter ELIZABETH and BURLEIGH.*

ELIZABETH.

Nay, Cecil, urge me not. I cannot steel  
My heart to murder her.

BURLEIGH.

'Twould not be murder, but a prudent act.  
Nay, justice would be met by it, and thou  
Hast great desire to be just. Ye must

46 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Put Mary, Queen of Scots, to death, or else  
Thou'lt ne'er know peace.

ELIZABETH.

I'd know no peace if I lopped off her head.  
I cannot, my Lord Burleigh, give consent,  
So let it rest.

BURLEIGH.

It is for love of thee I urge thee thus ;  
It is the love I bear my country that  
Dictates my counsel, gracious majesty.  
I would not see thee killed, my country robbed  
Of such a wise and virtuous queen, and ruled  
By blood-stained murderers, the enemies  
Of God and man. If thou wilt have no thought  
For thine own self, think of thy subjects' grief  
If they should lose so good a queen. They  
    know  
Thy life is placed in jeopardy, and this  
Doth cause them poignant sorrow, such as thou  
Canst not conceive. They use my mouth to  
    speak  
Their inward thoughts, and their one prayer is  
    this—  
That thou wilt put to most deserved death  
This Mary, Queen of Scots.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Cecil, well I know thy heart, and thy  
Great love for me. Thou art an honest man,  
And wise, but thou art liable to err.  
Methinks thy judgment's gone astray for once.  
I see no danger if she lives. She's safe  
Imprisoned in a castle, whence escape  
Is difficult ; nay, more, impossible.  
How can a queen of feeble health, in such  
A place, and watched with eagle eyes,  
Concoct a plot to murder me ? 'Twould be  
A miracle, thou must confess. What use  
A captive bird, whose wings are clipped, to sigh  
For liberty, if when the door was oped  
It fell unto the ground ? 'Twere safer in  
The cage, for there it would not run the risk  
Of being trampled on. Thou hast my word.  
I am resolved to let her live. She's not  
So bad as thou wouldst make her out.

BURLEIGH.

The captive bird hath friends. 'Tis they whom  
thou  
Must fear. Their love for her hath bred deep  
hate  
To thee. They're not confined. Their minds  
and hands

48 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Are free, and they would die, and count it glory,  
To aid her cause. It, then, is natural  
That they should plot to murder thee, and place  
The one they love upon the throne. If she  
Were dead they'd risk their lives in vain.

ELIZABETH.

I have decided, my good lord.

[*Exit BURLEIGH.*

An honest and a worthy man, whose zeal  
Hath blinded him. He cannot see I've not  
The heart to sign the warrant for her death.  
It is a task beyond my courage. I know  
Whilst she doth live my life's in jeopardy,  
And yet I am not bold enough to make  
It safe, or to remove the magazine  
On which my throne is set. But need I fear  
Whilst it is watched so zealously and with  
Such loving eyes as Burleigh has? I know  
He'll guard me well. Ah! would I had  
Around my throne more like my lord. My throne  
Would then be placed upon a mighty rock,  
Which storms could never shake. But I must be  
The tool of hypocrites! God's death! I know  
Their faces well. I'll sift the chaff and find  
A worthy storehouse for it, too.

*Enter* LEICESTER.

*(The Queen does not see him. He approaches her and kneels at her feet, his forehead bowed to the ground. She suddenly sees him.)*

ELIZABETH.

What beast is crawling here ?

LEICESTER.

No beast, beloved majesty, but one  
Who's nearly dead with grief, who's come to sue  
For life.

ELIZABETH.

To sue for that which thou dost not deserve ?  
Thou shouldst be grateful thou dost live, and  
hast  
The strength to crawl. But crawl not here ;  
this is  
No place for worms. I have a place beside  
The Thames will suit thee best.

LEICESTER.

Nay, mighty queen, most gracious majesty,  
The world itself is like the Tower to me.  
It is a prison where I never see  
The sun which gladdens all. Thou wert my sun,  
But since thy light was hid from me I've lived  
In gloom. Pray, pity me, for whom thou hadst

50 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

A love which others did not share. It is  
To me a grievous punishment to know  
That I have lost that love, but if thou hidest  
Thy face from me 'twill be my death.

ELIZABETH.

Well, thou wert better dead.

LEICESTER.

O God !

And canst thou not be merciful ?

ELIZABETH.

Be merciful to thee ?

Hast thou shown mercy unto me ?

LEICESTER.

I do confess, most gracious majesty,  
That I have erred and have offended thee.  
But wilt thou not forgive ? Thou hast forgiven  
Far deeper crimes than mine, not done in love  
For thee, as mine. I crave not for thy love—  
For I have forfeited what's so divine—  
But for forgiveness. Let me plead my love.  
'Twas that that urged my tongue to utter forth  
In madness feelings that were natural.  
Yea, natural, for thou didst give me hope  
That thou wouldst marry me.

ELIZABETH.

I gave thee hope?  
Thou liest, hypocrite. 'Tis true I had  
Much love for thee, because I thought thou wert  
A man. But I have found thee out. Thou art  
A base, deceitful wretch, a crawling worm.  
I'd tread on thee if I were merciful,  
For thou deservest death. Pray, go, vile beast,  
Nor let thy presence torture me. I'll let  
Thee live, but if I see thy face again,  
I'll put thee in a den thou wilt not like,  
But which will suit thy nature well.

(*Exit LEICESTER, crestfallen. ELIZABETH, after  
his departure, is for some moments silent.*)

O that I could recall such bitter words!  
Too late! too late! They've deeply wounded  
him.

Poor Leicester! thou wilt suffer agony,  
And I the cause of it! I do repent.  
I am to blame. I am too hard of heart.  
I know thy love for me is deep and true,  
And I've repaid it with ingratitude  
And angry words. 'Tis I who need forgiveness.  
Thy grief will give me rest nor day nor night.

52 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

O would I had a softer heart ! I then  
Would know——

(LA MOTTE FÉNELON *is announced.*)

Monsieur is welcome here.

FÉNELON.

I thank thee, great and mighty queen. I feel  
Most honoured by thy graciousness.

ELIZABETH.

What would my lord ambassador ?

FÉNELON.

To tell your majesty the happy news,  
The Queen of France, the wife of good King  
Charles,  
Hath borne a daughter.

ELIZABETH.

A daughter ?

Methought it was a son.

FÉNELON.

The rumour spread abroad it was a son,  
But it was false.

ELIZABETH.

I send them greetings.  
Go, write unto the noble king and queen

That I rejoice with them. The little princess  
Will be most welcomed in the world. I pray  
That God may give her joy and happiness  
Proportioned to her rank and high descent.

FÉNELON.

I will convey such kind and gracious words  
To those who'll be most touched by them.  
[Exit FÉNELON.]

ELIZABETH.

How every hour events do hap to tell,  
In blatant tones, that I'm a barren stock !  
That I'm alone, and have not e'en a child  
To love me and to ease, with prattling talk,  
My weighty cares ! I'm called on to rejoice  
With others when they have the sweet delights  
Denied to me. What mockery ! O God,  
What hollowness ! They little know the pain  
Such greetings give to me. Fierce jealousy  
Doth seem to gnaw my heart and make me hate  
Such happy mortals. Oh, I envy them ;  
I envy all, both high and low, who know  
What children's love is like. I've tasted all  
The pleasures of this world but that of love.  
Who loves me ? They who do pretend a love  
Do hate me in their hearts, for love assumed  
Is hatred in disguise. They know 'tis well

54 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

To humour me. Their welfare doth depend  
On pleasing me. Dependence is the soil  
Most fertile for the growth of hate, and that's  
The soil in which my life is cast. I am  
The most unenviable of queens.

[*Exit ELIZABETH.*

SCENE V.—*Night. A country place.*

*Enter LEICESTER and COUNTESS OF ESSEX.*

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Methinks thou art a deep and wondrous man.  
The queen is angered, and thy enemies  
Rejoice o'er thy discomfiture, and boast  
They'll bring thee further down. Thy hopes  
And thy ambition have received a blow,  
Enough to crush thee, yet thou wear'st a smile,  
And art most light of heart; nay, full of joy.  
Thou rather shouldst be in a grievous mood,  
As other men would be.

LEICESTER.

Ha! ha!

Thou dost not know me yet. 'Twere time thou  
didst,  
For I am easily read.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Thou'rt not indeed.

Thy character is writ in language which  
Requires no common skill to read.

LEICESTER.

Nay, is it so ?

Then I may pride myself on this ?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Thou mayst indeed.

LEICESTER.

My character is rare, thou sayst ?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

'Tis very rare.

LEICESTER.

I'm glad on it.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Glad !

LEICESTER.

Ay, glad.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Pray why ?

LEICESTER.

Dost think I'd have a common nature, love ?  
My great ambition is to be—pray, guess.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

I am no skilful guesser ; 'tis, no doubt,  
As strange as is thyself.

LEICESTER.

It is, I must confess,  
But 'tis no foolish one, but one most wise.  
It is to be unlike the common kind  
In everything. I wish to stand aloof,  
To be above them, out of reach of them.  
They know my handsome form doth make them  
look  
Contemptible and mean, and doth attract  
The favour of the queen. This angers them,  
As is most natural. I knew not I  
Possessed so many gifts until this hour.  
Thy words have cured my sorrow and have fed  
My heart with hope, for which I thank thee,  
sweet.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Then is it I who've filled thee with this joy ?

LEICESTER.

'Tis thou !

And is it not most natural ? To whom  
Should I, in sorrow, look for sympathy  
But thee ? Thou art the source of all my joy.  
Thou art the light which dissipates the gloom  
In which my life is ofttimes cast. Thou art  
The sun for which I look in certain hope  
Through long and tedious nights. It would be  
strange  
If thou shouldst bring me grief, or make me live  
In deeper gloom, or make my life but one  
Perpetual night.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Doth it increase thy love for me ?

LEICESTER.

My love for thee !

I cannot measure it ; it reaches heights  
So lofty, and extends to depths profound.  
The more I see of thee, the more I hear  
Thy heavenly voice, the more I contemplate  
Thy wondrous loveliness, the more my love  
Doth grow, and my desire to wed thee soon.  
But list ! Who comes this way ? Canst thou  
not hear ?

58 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

The tones are harsh and fierce.

LEICESTER.

Come, let's conceal ourselves behind yon hedge ;  
'Twere best we were not seen.

[LEICESTER and COUNTESS OF ESSEX retire.

*Enter* LADY MOLE (*late FREEZE*) and her husband,  
SIR THOMAS MOLE.

MOLE.

Oh that I had not married thee ! Had I  
Been keen of sight, I would have seen and steered  
With safety past the iceberg which hath wrecked  
My life.

LADY MOLE.

But what of me,  
Thou heartless, godless, and abandoned wretch ?  
Where hast thou guided me ? To what a place  
Have I been brought ! O perfect misery !  
Away from light, from loveliness, and all  
That's dear on earth, to dirt, and gloom, and all  
That is repellent to pure taste.

MOLE.

Pure taste, indeed !  
Is it pure taste that forms such ugly words

As thou dost utter forth ? Is it pure taste  
That makes thee bawl and shout, that makes thee  
strive

To be a thing inhuman ? I thought pure taste  
Was that which loved a quiet, happy life,  
And not a cold and dull, repulsive one.

LADY MOLE.

I utter ugly words ? I bawl and shout ?  
Yea, I a thing inhuman ? What art thou ?  
Yea, what must thou be with thy filth and dirt ?  
What language could describe thee truthfully ?  
Thou sayst my life is cold and dull. Who's made  
It so ? Who's kept from me the warmth and  
light ?

Who's brought me this unhappiness ? Yea, who  
Hath dragged me down to misery ? 'Tis thou !  
'Tis thou, I say ! Thou cold and heartless man !  
Thou fiend, worse than the devil himself !

MOLE.

Ha, ha !

Yea, I'm to blame ! I've brought thee all this  
grief !

I've been a cruel husband ! Yea, thou dost  
Deserve much sympathy. Henceforth I'll try  
To be as kind and gentle unto thee  
As was thy former husband, whom ye killed.

60 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Poor man ! I pity him ! His end was sad,  
To leave a wife so loving.

LADY MOLE.

What !

Am I a murderess ? O God, what next !  
What will this wicked man accuse me of ?  
Oh, wilt Thou let him live and say such things ?  
Such lies ? What punishment doth he deserve ?  
Is there on earth his equal—one so vile ?  
As full of wickedness and all disease  
As grapes of honeyed juice ! O wretched me !  
Oh, think of it, that I'm to live with him !  
O days of darkness yet to come ! O woe !  
O perfect wretchedness ! Oh, pity me,  
A poor defenceless woman, who dost stand  
In need of sympathy and help !

MOLE.

Thou need'st not stand in need of it. Thou  
need'st  
Not call for sympathy and help. Thou need'st  
Not live with me. I'd gladly let thee go,  
Where'er thou wilt, that I might live in peace.

LADY MOLE.

That doth betray thee well—thy cruel heart.  
Thou wouldst abandon me and let me face,  
Alone, the cheerless world.

MOLE.

That would not be a new experience ;  
For thou wert facing it courageously  
Before I married thee.

LADY MOLE.

O wretch !  
Whate'er I say thou tripp'st me up. I'll speak  
My thoughts no more, but act them out.  
[*Exeunt both.*]

*Re-enter* LEICESTER and COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

And dost thou know them, love ?

LEICESTER.

I know them well.  
Such scenes as these were prophesied before  
They wed. I do not pity him, for he  
Would marry her in spite of sage advice.  
He had no lack of friends who warned him well,  
And would have saved him from this wreck. I  
could  
Recount to thee the story of her life.  
'Tis full of interest, though not of acts  
Deserving praise. It's been a varied life,  
Where virtue's had but little sway. 'Tis true,

62 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

And is well known, her former husband died  
Not from excessive love. Couldst thou, my sweet,  
Be such a wife to me?

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Nay, Dudley,  
Thou know'st my love for thee is much too deep  
And true. I pity him. I think he is  
Deserving sympathy.

LEICESTER.

Nay, let's dismiss all thoughts of both, and talk  
Of our own joys and of the happiness  
That is to be when we are man and wife.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

I'd rather think of them awhile, and of  
The lives they lead. I feel quite sad.

LEICESTER.

Come, come !  
I cannot let thee brood o'er this. Forget  
This scene, and bend thy thoughts on me and on  
The time when I shall marry thee.

[*Exeunt both.*

SCENE VI.—*France. A garden at the Royal Castle of Blois. Enter CATHERINE DE MEDICIS SIR THOMAS SMITH (a very short man), and WALSINGHAM.*

CATHERINE.

I have great sympathy for her indeed.  
She's in the midst of scheming enemies,  
Who seek her ruin. She is not safe, alone.  
It is not natural that she should guide,  
Alone, a ship so great, and carrying  
Such precious souls. It is a treacherous sea  
O'er which her voyage lies. No woman's strength  
Could battle with success the fearful storms  
That constantly and suddenly arise.  
She needs a captain, bold, experienced,  
In whom she may, with safety, put her trust.

WALSINGHAM.

'Tis very true.

I would that she relied less on herself.

SMITH.

Nay, if she had a captain, she would want  
To guide the ship herself.

WALSINGHAM.

Yea, 'tis very true.

CATHERINE.

But if he were a skilful man, he would  
Refuse to let her guide. Though she might bawl,  
It need not loosen his firm hold. There is  
A way of doing this with gentleness.

WALSINGHAM.

Ay, true !

SMITH.

I'd dare to argue thus with her—and will !

CATHERINE.

Nay, wilt thou ?

SMITH.

I will, by God !

CATHERINE.

Thou art most brave. I do admire thee.  
I see thou lov'st thy country and thy queen.

SMITH.

Most fervently.  
I'd sell my life to save them both.

WALSINGHAM.

Nor would I hesitate to lay down mine.

CATHERINE.

Ye both are worthy, noble men. I would  
Such men were grown in France. Alas, we have  
Too few ! Is Norfolk executed yet ?

WALSINGHAM.

Nay,

Not that we have learnt.

CATHERINE.

Belike the queen will pardon him ?

WALSINGHAM.

We cannot tell.

CATHERINE.

I would that she were quiet from these broils.

BOTH.

I would she were.

CATHERINE.

She could be if she chose.

BOTH.

Pray, how ?

CATHERINE.

By marrying.

SMITH.

'Twere well if she would wed.

CATHERINE.

Dost think that she could fancy marriage with  
My son, the Duc d'Alençon?

SMITH.

Madam,  
Thou knowest me of old. Except I have  
A certain ground, I dare not say how she  
Would act in such a case.

WALSINGHAM.

No man could tell her mind on this.

CATHERINE.

Come, tell me, do ye think yourselves that she  
Could marry one more worthy her? Though I  
May justly be considered partial to  
My son, yet I have heard it stated that  
The emperor's son, the Archduke Rodolf, or  
E'en John of Austria, are not so noble,  
But much inferior to Alençon.

BOTH.

We do not doubt it, madam.

CATHERINE.

If your most gracious majesty intends  
To wed, it were a pity much more time  
Was lost.

SMITH.

We know not that she doth intend to wed.  
If it pleased God she married and did have  
A child, these brags and treasons would be soon  
Appeased, and if its father were thy son,  
The duke, I would not care, so long as she  
Were guarded well and safe.

CATHERINE.

I would that it were done, for I would then  
Go o'er and see her, which I much desire.

SMITH.

Yea, if I had  
As ample a commission now as I  
Once had for Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou,  
The thing would soon be at an end.

CATHERINE.

Oh, would thou hadst !  
Yea, if thou hadst another one, on thy  
Return to England wouldst thou come to France  
Again to execute it ?

SMITH.

Yea, madam,  
Most gladly. For so good a purpose would  
I cross the sea again, if I were never  
So sick.

WALSINGHAM.

I would be glad to lend my aid in what  
I so desire, and which I think would be  
For our best good.

CATHERINE.

I'm glad on it.  
I hope she will commission ye.

BOTH.

I hope so, madam.

SMITH.

If she were wed, all trait'rous hearts would be  
Discouraged, for one tree alone is soon  
Cut down, but two or three together take  
Much longer doing.

CATHERINE.

I see no reason why the queen should not  
Have many children.

SMITH.

I would to God that she had one.

WALSINGHAM.

Amen !

CATHERINE.

Nay, two boys, lest the one should die.

SMITH.

Thou thinkst the duke would speed ?

CATHERINE (*laughing*).

Je le désire infiniment.

I doubt, howe'er, he will not grow so tall

As is his brother, le Duc d'Anjou.

He is not short, indeed, for he's as tall

As thou.

SMITH.

That cannot be an obstacle. I make

But small account of that, indeed. I have

No admiration for tall men, for did

Not Pepin bring forth Charlemagne, though he

Scarce reached the girdle of his wife ? And then

Your Oliver, the Breton constable,

According to his tomb he must have been

But four feet high, and yet ye worship him

For his great deeds. He was a valiant man,

And dreaded most by Englishmen. The duke's

Short stature's not the thing that thou need'st  
dread.

CATHERINE.

I'm glad on it.  
Perchance thou'lt bring it yet to pass.

SMITH.

We'll try,  
And have great hopes we shall succeed.

CATHERINE.

Pray God ye will.

BOTH.

Amen.

[*Exeunt* SMITH and WALSINGHAM.]

CATHERINE.

My bark is sailing with a fav'ring wind.  
I see fair weather for some time to come.  
These silly men assist me on my course,  
Because they think I'll bring them to a place  
Where's found prosperity. They little know  
The shoals and sands which they will meet, nor  
see  
The rock on which they will be wrecked. Ha!  
ha!  
I'm prospering beyond my fondest hopes.  
Ah, proud, conceited queen, I'll humble thee!  
I'll tumble thee from that proud eminence

Where thou hast set thyself! My hate for thee  
Is such that time will ne'er appease it, nor  
Submission soften it. I know a way  
To kill thee out, but I prefer to see  
Thy ling'ring agony. That is a joy  
I shall experience ere long.

*Enter the DUC D'ALENÇON.*

ALENÇON.

I see thou'rt happy, mother.

CATHERINE.

And thou hast need to be, my son. These men  
Are safe. They'll urge the marriage on. I know  
The queen doth put great trust in them, and will  
Be guided by their counsel; so thou need'st  
Must live in hope thou wilt rule England yet.  
Thou know'st the purport of our talk?

ALENÇON.

I heard it all,  
And marked how well ye managed it and led  
Them on. I'm proud of thee.

CATHERINE.

And thou hast need to be.  
To me alone thou'lt owe the fortune which  
Has been denied to others worthier it.

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Howe'er, this is not yet success. There's much  
To do and much to reason out.

ALENÇON.

But naught too difficult for thee.

CATHERINE.

God knows, my son.

[*Exeunt* CATHERINE and ALENÇON.]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*London. An apartment in the Palace at Westminster.*

*Enter QUEEN ELIZABETH reading a letter from the*  
DUC D'ALENÇON.

‘To the beautiful and virtuous Queen of England.

‘MOST ESTEEMED MAJESTY,

‘O that I had words that could befittingly express my thoughts! Alas! I can but feebly write them. O that I could see thy own true self, my eyes, my every organ would utter forth and emphasize the truth of what my heart doth wish to say. I live in hopes, beloved and most gracious majesty, that thou wilt look on me as one who doth deserve to look on thee; to come quite close to thee; yea, say the words which love alone inspires. I’ve heard men speak of thee as one most wondrous fair; divinely virtuous;

possessing wisdom that befits thy mighty rank.  
 My heart doth prompt me, yea, compels me to  
 adore and worship thee ; to love thee ; for thou'rt  
 worthy of the love of any king or prince. Pray  
 let me offer at thy virgin shrine my humble self,  
 as one who would aspire to marry thee and  
 cherish thee with fervent and undying love.

‘ Devoutly kneeling, I salute with gratitude thy  
 beauteous hand, and live in hope thou’lt favour  
 me.

‘ Thy humble, faithful servant,

‘ ALENÇON.’

#### ELIZABETH.

The words are sweetly beautiful. Methinks  
 He is a noble and a virtuous prince,  
 Yea, far above my suitors hitherto.  
 Their language was as coarse as was their love,  
 Their sentiments as harsh, as dull, as cold,  
 But here I cannot find a fault. The words  
 Are perfect, full of sweetness, grace, and truth.  
 Could any coarse soul utter them ? Yea, could  
 A man who had no loving, noble heart  
 Express such lovely thoughts ? Could sweetness  
     come  
 From what is sour ? Could flowers spring up in  
     soil

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That is not favourable to their growth? Nay,  
nay.

Could loveliness spring forth from barrenness?

Could wisdom speak the words of ignorance?

Could nature change her laws and be untrue?

This prince doth please me well. I like his  
thoughts

And words, and I am sure shall like himself.

*Enter* LA MOTTE FÉNELON.

FÉNELON.

Good-morrow, gracious majesty!

ELIZABETH.

Good-morrow, Fénelon.

What wills my lord ambassador?

FÉNELON.

To pay my true respects unto your majesty.

ELIZABETH.

Ha!

Thy countenance doth speak another object.

Pray, out with it, for I do hate delay.

FÉNELON.

Thy marvellous gifts have truly read my face.

Thou hast an insight into human looks

Most wonderful, yet quite consistent with

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Thy other matchless gifts. Then thus it is.  
I would that thou couldst give an answer to  
My master's gracious message unto thee.

ELIZABETH.

So soon ? What !  
No time to think it o'er ? Come, Fénelon,  
Thou art not serious ! This is a matter  
Which should take years to think upon. Dost  
thou  
Not know a virgin's heart ? What ! wouldst thou  
have  
A woman give her heart to any man,  
When he doth ask for it, without a thought  
Of what she doth ? How longer should she  
think,  
How exercise more prudence, when she is  
A queen ? She studies not herself alone,  
Nor her own heart. It is her subjects' heart,  
And their souls' welfare which she gives away ;  
And thou dost seek a speedy answer ! Fie !  
I thought thou wert a more considerate man.

FÉNELON.

Forgive me, gracious majesty, if I  
Have been o'er-hasty. I plead the strong excuse  
Of my poor master's love for thee. Pray, think  
Of him, and all the pangs delay will bring

To him. 'Tis natural his mighty love  
Should pine for words of hope. It is the food  
For which he's hungering. I love him so,  
I would not have him starve and pine, when thou  
Couldst feed him up with angels' food.

ELIZABETH.

I doubt he hath this love for me.

FÉNELON.

What !

Canst doubt his love? O God, would all could  
love

As he ! Who could not love thee ?

ELIZABETH.

I've had no proofs of it.

FÉNELON.

No proofs !

I thought thou wert o'erwhelmed with proofs.

ELIZABETH.

A written letter is no proof.

FÉNELON.

I grant it ; yea,

I grant it, but I've in my keep a proof

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Which must convince thee, or thou ne'er wilt be  
Convinced.

ELIZABETH.

What is it, pray ?

FÉNELON.

A letter which he wrote some years ago  
Unto his bosom friend, De Foix. I found  
This letter 'mongst the papers of his friend,  
And though I've no commands to show it thee,  
I'll let thee read it if thou hast a wish.

ELIZABETH.

With all my heart,  
And hope I'll find in it the proof I need.

FÉNELON (*handing the letter*).

Pray God thou wilt.

ELIZABETH (*reads*).

'I echo fervently what thou dost say. From  
all reports she is an angel, though in human form.  
I count it happiness to worship such a one. How  
happy must that nation be whose queen she is !  
But, oh, how blest and happy must that mortal  
be to whom she gives a wifely love ! I'd tell her  
of my love if I could hope she'd deign to marry

me. But no! It cannot be. I was not born for such great happiness. She's worthy of a greater and a nobler one. I must content myself with love and admiration from afar.

‘Thy everlasting friend,

‘ALENÇON.’

I must confess 'tis written well.

FÉNELON.

But wilt thou not confess  
It is a proof of his undying love?

ELIZABETH.

I do not doubt his love,  
But my own worthiness to be the wife  
Of such a noble prince. For I am old,  
And he is young, and after we've been wed  
A little time he will despise me.

FÉNELON.

Nay, canst thou doubt thy worth? Thou dost  
thyself  
A grievous wrong. It is the duke who is  
Unworthy thee. Nay, as for age, there's no  
Disparity in that. The difference  
Is but the trifling one of nineteen years,  
And as thy charms of person and of mind

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Make thee look younger by ten years, and as  
The manly figure, wisdom, and good grace  
Of monsieur doth make him look more aged by  
full  
Nine years, ye're on equality.

*Enter LEICESTER.*

But I will leave thee, gracious majesty,  
And live in hopes thou'lt know thy charms,  
And be less humble.

*[Exit FÉNELON, scowling at LEICESTER.]*

ELIZABETH.

What dost thou here ?

LEICESTER.

To be in the sun.

ELIZABETH.

But clouds are coming on.

LEICESTER.

Nay, gracious majesty ;  
I hope thou ne'er wilt frown on me again.  
'Twill be my death.

ELIZABETH.

Poor man !

I've acted cruelly to thee.

LEICESTER.

Nay, thou hast ever been most kind.

ELIZABETH.

Thou hast deserved my smiles.

LEICESTER.

I have deserved thy censure, thou dost mean.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, Leicester, thou hast served me faithfully.  
Thy love for me hath been the only love  
On which I could rely. Those who pretend  
To worship me, who make the most parade  
Of their great love, are cringing hypocrites.  
They think I cannot read their lying hearts,  
But I'll translate their words some day  
To their discomfiture. How happy should  
I feel if all my subjects were as true,  
As loving, and sincere as thou ! But no ;  
There's but one Leicester in the land, and thou  
Art he.

LEICESTER.

I am not worthy of this flattery.  
I have but done my duty to my queen,  
As I do hope all have.

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ELIZABETH.

But they have not, as thou well know'st, and I'm  
Resolved to let them reap the fruit for which  
They've sown. They flatter me and say I'm wise,  
And fit to be their queen, but in their hearts  
They wish me dead, that they might have a king.

LEICESTER.

I little thought they were so false.

ELIZABETH.

Canst thou deny it?

LEICESTER.

Thou knowest them more deeply than myself;  
Long time I have suspected them.

ELIZABETH.

Hast thou had cause for it?

LEICESTER.

I must confess I have.

ELIZABETH.

If in my youth they thought not well of me,  
What must they think of me when old? They'll  
wish  
More eagerly to have a king.

LEICESTER.

Methinks they will.

ELIZABETH.

O God !

Wouldst Thou would keep old age from me,  
And let me be avenged on them ! For are  
They not Thine enemies as well as mine,  
To spurn Thine own anointed one ? But with  
Thy help I will defeat them yet. I'll wed,  
And let them have a king. Yea, they  
Shall have their wish fulfilled, but it shall be  
To their most bitter grief. I'll marry him  
Who loves me for myself, that he may be  
The instrument I'll use to torture them.

LEICESTER.

This were a prudent step to take, and I  
Commend thee in this wise resolve.

ELIZABETH.

Wouldst thou approve of this ?

LEICESTER.

There's naught on earth would please me more.

ELIZABETH.

And dost thou think it would be wise ?

LEICESTER.

I'm sure on it.

ELIZABETH.

I'll marry then, by God!

LEICESTER.

But whom?—but when?

ELIZABETH.

As speedily as matters will allow.

LEICESTER.

But thou hast spurned thy suitors and hast none  
Possessing qualities thou canst admire.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, Dudley, nay.

I know there's one on earth who hath a love  
For me too deep to be untrue; who hath  
A noble nature, too.

LEICESTER.

I would that I could guess his name.

ELIZABETH.

I'll tell it thee ere many days are o'er.

*[Exeunt both.]*

SCENE II.—*A street in London.*

*Enter TWO GENTLEMEN in conversation.*

1ST GENT.

I hear that my lord Leicester is very much with her majesty, and that she shows him the great affection she was wont.

2ND GENT.

I cannot understand her, friend. She is quite beyond my skill to fathom her.

1ST GENT.

She's beyond the skill of any man. I've long ceased to be surprised at anything she does, and am quite calm conversing of her freaks. Not only doth she regard him with the same liking as of yore, but tries to please him more.

2ND GENT.

Each day exhibits some new strangeness in her.

1ST GENT.

They say that his enemies are greatly disconcerted, and strive in every way to grow into his liking.

## 2ND GENT.

Theirs is a hard and grievous task. I'd rather live in humble circumstances, friend, than be dependent on the treacherous smiles of royalty. 'Tis climbing up a steep and slippery hill. Though we may tread most carefully, we may dislodge some obstacle which lets us down to ruin. An humble life is built on firmer ground, and happiness is often hidden in security. At least, it gives more peace of mind.

## 1ST GENT.

Alas! these climbing men know little peace of mind. Their lot is sad, their lives are most precarious; nor do I envy them. Thou said'st the queen would pass this way?

## 2ND GENT.

I said so, friend. These decorations are in honour of her journey through. With what a fondness all regard her! They worship her as though she were an angel sent from heaven.

## 1ST GENT.

Their love for her is very deep.

2ND GENT.

Pray look at them. No sad and rueful face among them all, but beaming o'er with happiness and joy. How eagerly they wait her coming! She'll smile on them, and that will be an antidote for all their sorrows for some years to come. (*Trumpets sound.*) She comes! Let's stand aside and watch her pass.

(*Presently enter procession amidst the applause of the populace. At length enters ELIZABETH, with LEICESTER, as Master of Horse, close behind, and all other officers and dignitaries of the State.*)

CITIZENS.

God bless your gracious majesty!  
Long live our blessed queen!

1ST CITIZEN.

How beautiful she looks!

2ND CITIZEN.

How graciously she bends to all and smiles!

CITIZENS.

May God preserve your majesty!  
(*ELIZABETH stays the procession.*)

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1ST CITIZEN.

She'll speak to us.

2ND CITIZEN.

She beckons silence, friend.

3RD CITIZEN.

Pray, silence for our gracious queen !

CITIZENS.

Silence ! silence !

The queen would speak to us.

ELIZABETH.

My loving subjects,

I thank ye all. I see ye love me well.

*(Affirmative murmurs.)*

I'm not deserving of such honest love.

CITIZENS.

Yea, yea !

Our lives are thine, most gracious sovereign.

ELIZABETH.

My life is thine. 'Tis at your service, friends.

Command, and I will do. If I have done

Aught ill to ye, I ask forgiveness now.

'Twas done in ignorance of what ye wish,

And I have been deceived. I swear to make  
Amends if I have done ye harm.

CITIZENS.

Thou hast not done a single subject harm,  
Thou art too kind and good.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis God who hath directed me, and Him  
Ye all must thank.

CITIZENS.

We will, we will !  
We'll thank Him, for He sent thee unto us.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis true, my loving friends.  
He placed me on the throne of this great land.  
He sent me here to be your queen and friend,  
To save ye from your enemies and His.  
Yea, ye have foes amongst ye here who would  
Destroy the Church and throne. But these are  
safe,  
For they are built upon your jealous love  
And piety, foundations which no storm of heresy  
Can overturn. Ye're prosperous indeed,  
Because ye serve and do the will of God.  
I'm happy in such subjects, for I know  
As long as ye are His your souls are safe,

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The end for which I hourly pray.

God bless ye, friends. I leave ye in His keeping.

*(The procession moves off amidst the enthusiasm and  
applause of the populace, who run after it. The  
TWO GENTLEMEN come forward.)*

1ST GENT.

Methinks she is a godly queen.

2ND GENT.

Her thoughts were clothed most piously. Alas!  
I have a doubt of their sincerity.

1ST GENT.

I have no doubt of any kind. I look  
On wonders now as things quite natural.

*[Exeunt TWO GENTLEMEN.]*

SCENE III.—*A room in the house of* SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON.

*Enter* HATTON *and his servant* WHITLEY.

HATTON.

Ah, Whitley, thou art happier than I.

WHITLEY.

How so, my master? That can never be.

When thou dost grieve, I suffer pain; when thou  
Art joyous, then I know true happiness.

HATTON.

Thy love for me, I know, is very deep,  
But yet it cannot feel the painful stab  
Which the ingratitude of queens may give.  
That is reserved for me. Yea, I alone  
Must suffer that keen agony.

WHITLEY.

Alas! I suffer thy ingratitude,  
Which is a grievous pang to me. But yet  
I know thou lov'st me well, and dost not mean  
To doubt my love.

HATTON.

Nay, Whitley, nay.

I am as sure of thy great love for me  
As I am of the queen's ingratitude.  
There was a time when I was all in all  
To her, and when she called me her sweet lids,  
Her sheep, her mutton, and her belwether;  
But those bright days are gone. The glorious sun  
Of her sweet face is now obscured by clouds.  
Alas! what ruinous and threat'ning clouds!  
I fear I ne'er shall look on her again,  
Or kiss her loving hand. Oh that I could!  
There is some comfort, Whitley, that she writes  
To me. It doth in manner ease my grief.

WHITLEY.

I would my master would forget her.

HATTON.

Forget her, Whitley ! Nay, upon my life  
I could not banish her.

WHITLEY.

But if thou couldst, 'twould bring more peace to  
thee.

HATTON.

More peace!

Alas, poor man ! I parted with it long  
Ago. I ne'er shall look for peace until  
I die. I'd rather think of her, in spite  
Of her ingratitude, than never gaze  
In meditation on her angel face.  
Methinks I'll write to her.

WHITLEY.

I would not ; yea, I would not.

HATTON.

Pray, why ?

WHITLEY.

'Twould give her cause for mirth.

HATTON.

Nay ; rather would it move her heart to pity.

WHITLEY.

Thou canst not move a stony heart with words ;  
But if thou couldst, what wouldst thou get from it ?  
Naught sweet and nourishing.

HATTON.

She hath no stony heart.

WHITLEY.

Methinks she hath, indeed. To thee she owes  
More than she ever could repay, and yet  
She spurns thee off to nurse this viper Leicester.

HATTON.

'Tis not her fault. He hath a witch's charm,  
'Gainst which the queen is powerless. Nay,  
Whitley,  
We must not censure her, but rather should  
We pity her. I'll write to her.

WHITLEY.

But thou wilt do it 'gainst my wish.

HATTON.

I must.

'Twill ease my mind a deal.

WHITLEY.

Well, if thou must, thou must. I say again,  
Thou wilt repent it.

HATTON.

My heart constraineth me to write. (*He writes.*)

‘MY MOST ESTEEMED AND GRACIOUS LADY,

‘If I could express my feelings of your gracious letters, I should utter unto you matter of strange effect. In reading of them, with my tears I blot them; in thinking of them, I feel so great comfort that I find cause, God knoweth, to read them on my knees. Madam, I find the greatest lack that ever poor wretch sustained. I lack *that* I live by. My spirit and soul, I feel, agreeth with my body and life that to serve thee is a heaven, but to lack thee is more than hell’s torment unto them. My heart is full of woe. Pardon my tedious writing; it doth much diminish my great griefs. Would God I were with you but for one hour! My wits are overwrought with thoughts. I find myself amazed. Bear with me, my most dear, sweet lady. Passion overcometh me. Shall I utter this dismal word, “Farewell”? Yea, ten thousand, thousand farewells! He speaketh it that most dearly loveth you. I hold

you too long. Once again I crave pardon, and so bid your own poor "lids" farewell.

‘Your bondsman, everlastingly tied,  
‘CHRIS. HATTON.’

SCENE IV.—*A street in London.*

*Enter BURLEIGH and JOHN MELVILLE, in conversation.*

BURLEIGH.

Ah, John, it is a merry world indeed  
To lookers-on. 'Tis full of humorous stuff  
To cause them laughter; but to those who take  
A part in this performance, and who help  
To mix things up—although against their will—  
It is a serious task.

MELVILLE.

I know it, Cecil; yea, I've learnt all this  
To my discomfiture. For what we're born  
I'm oft in serious doubt. I'm sure 'tis not  
To make things smooth. It is beyond our skill.  
The earth itself is made of ups and downs,  
And so, methinks, our lives must be.

BURLEIGH.

I would I could invent a way whereby  
They could be levelled.

MELVILLE.

As long as we are ruled by sovereigns  
Who know not their own minds, it were lost time  
To ponder o'er it long.

BURLEIGH.

This villain Leicester will disturb us all,  
I can foresee. His insolence will know  
No bounds, and when let loose it will befoul  
The very air we breathe and poison us.  
Whilst he's alive I dread what's like to happen.

MELVILLE.

Well, Cecil, to bewail our fate will not  
Preserve us from it. We will do our duty,  
And thus enjoy the surer happiness  
Of doing right.

BURLEIGH.

'Tis not my own fate I lament, but 'tis  
The nation's. Think of what's in store for it.

MELVILLE.

Leave it to do its duty, Burleigh.

BURLEIGH.

What is its duty to a queen who doth  
Allow a vain, ambitious, vicious man

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To counsel her? Thou couldst not blame it,  
John,  
If it did murmur loudly.

MELVILLE.

Ah, Cecil, 'tis a problem far beyond  
My skill to solve.

BURLEIGH.

I hope to God  
She'll find it out ere long.

MELVILLE.

With all my heart I echo thee.

*[Exeunt both.]*

*Enter SUSSEX and LORD LINCOLN.*

SUSSEX.

What dost thou fear?

LINCOLN.

O God!

Is there not much to fear?

SUSSEX.

Tut! tut!

The queen's too changeful nature gives us hope.  
'Tis but a passing whim of hers. She'll tire  
Of him again ere long. He hath not skill

98 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

To stand on dizzy heights. His heart gets weak ;  
His mind grows faint ; his head doth whirl, and  
down

He falls. He's skilful in the climbing up,  
But he doth lose his balance on the top.  
If needful, there's a way to bring him down  
With greater certainty.

LINCOLN.

Pray how ?

SUSSEX.

To make the height to which he seeks to climb  
More slippery.

LINCOLN.

I cannot reach thy meaning.

SUSSEX.

Why, make the queen suspicious ; tell her how  
He boasts of conquering her ; of how she fears  
To do what would displease him ; how he says,  
And she doth quickly, gladly do ; yea, how  
He scorns her in his heart. This is a way  
That will most surely bring him low—as low  
As is the grave itself.

LINCOLN.

I'm glad on it.

I am more hopeful now.

SUSSEX.

Then we may tell her of the nation's tears  
And murmurings, and prophesy a storm  
From it that will, with mighty violence,  
Disturb her throne. Methinks such news as this  
Would almost cure her of itself.

LINCOLN.

Pray God it will!

*[Exeunt both.]*

*Re-enter BURLEIGH, with LEICESTER.*

BURLEIGH.

I'm glad that thou art reconciled to her.

LEICESTER.

I tell thee, Burleigh, she is in my power.  
She loves me far more deeply than she did;  
Nor would I wonder if she married me.

BURLEIGH.

Nay, nor would I.  
Methinks she will. I've noted with what deep  
Regard she bends to thee. I would that I  
Were in thy place.

LEICESTER.

No doubt thou dost.  
And there are many more who have the same

100 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Deep wish ; yea, many more who envy me  
And hate me with undying hate.

BURLEIGH.

Nay !

LEICESTER.

I know them well. The queen doth know them,  
too.

BURLEIGH.

It cannot be.

They cannot hate thee so.

LEICESTER.

Ha, ha !

How innocent thou art !

BURLEIGH.

Perchance thou knowest more than I ?

LEICESTER.

Thou know'st a little, too.

BURLEIGH.

A little ? yea, 'tis true.

Not near so much as thou dost seem to know.  
How dost thou mean to punish them ?

LEICESTER.

I will devise a little torture that  
Will cure them well.

BURLEIGH.

Nay,  
Thou canst afford to be more merciful.  
Pray, let me intercede for them.

LEICESTER.

I'd counsel thee  
To intercede for thine own self.

*[Exeunt both.]*

SCENE V.—*France. Garden at the Palace at Blois.*

*Enter CATHERINE DE MEDICIS and CHARLES IX.*  
*in conversation.*

CATHERINE.

Thou art too faint of heart to be a king.  
Thou art not bold enough to slay thy foes.  
Come, pluck up courage, son, and show thyself  
A man, and fit to rule the mighty France.

CHARLES.

It is not courage that I need, but 'tis  
A cruel heart.

CATHERINE.

Ha, ha !

A cruel heart, indeed ! A cruel heart  
To kill thy enemies ! It is not just  
To make thyself secure ? to serve thy God ?  
And to preserve His Church ? 'Tis cruelty !  
Thou'lt treat with kindness those who plot thy  
fall ?

With gentleness the men who seek thy death ?  
Nay, thou wouldst aid thy foes to murder thee ?  
Would draw the dagger to thy breast ? Most  
strange !

I have a bold and grateful son indeed ;  
My country has a brave and resolute king ;  
The Church I love a noble champion.  
I would I had not given thee birth.

CHARLES.

Nay, mother,  
Thou dost not count the cost of what thou urgest.

CATHERINE.

The cost !

What can it cost ? I know the recompense—  
Glory and peace, and great prosperity.  
Who are these canting hypocrites ? these foes  
Of God and man ? these stirrers-up of strife ?  
What is their mission here ? What is their use

In this most busy world ? To plot and scheme ;  
To be the enemies of peace ; to spread  
Dismay and ruin ; yea, to threaten men  
Of piety and holiness. To curse,  
To put to death such serpents, beasts, and worms,  
Would be a holy act, and would obtain  
The sanction of our justice-loving God.  
I urge thee to this deed of justice, son,  
Because I'd have thee be the instrument  
To do God's will. When thou and I are dead,  
Posterity will bless us for this work.

CHARLES.

I see it is my duty, mother.

CATHERINE.

Thy duty ! yea.  
Our duty is to seek and know God's will,  
And to perform it, though it bring us hate.  
To take deep vengeance on His enemies  
Is what He seeks from us, and those who have  
The power to do it are His chosen ones.  
Thy brother comes this way, and wearing smiles.

*Enter* ALENÇON.

Well, son, what means this joyousness ?

ALENÇON.

I have received glad news from Fénelon.  
Elizabeth is well disposed to me,  
And speaks in hopeful terms of our betrothal.  
Is that not cause for joyousness ?

CATHERINE.

It is, my son.  
It gives me wondrous cheer to hear this news.  
What doth he say ?

ALENÇON.

That she regards me as a noble prince,  
A brave and valiant man ; that she doth ask  
For proofs of my affection every day,  
And reads with no concealèd joy my letters.

CATHERINE.

'Tis well.  
I can assure thee this is evidence  
That love is growing in her heart. I know  
Its mode of growth in woman far too well  
To be deceived. Is there aught else he said ?

ALENÇON.

That more than all she was impressed by what  
She thought was written to De Foix. (*Laughs.*)

CATHERINE (*smiling*).

Ah! ah!

We will not laugh at such simplicity,  
But mourn that thou must marry such a one,  
To glorify thy country and thy Church.  
Thou speedest well, my son. I see this England,  
This proud, imperious, yet most silly queen,  
The slaves of France. I see the Catholic Church  
Implanted on the soil where heresy  
Doth thrive. I see beloved France rise up  
And rule the world, and ye the arbiters  
'Tween nations, men, and God Himself. How  
blest  
Am I, the mother of such sons!

[*Exeunt all.*]

SCENE VI.—*Westminster. A room in the Palace.*

*Enter QUEEN ELIZABETH and FÉNELON in conversation*

ELIZABETH.

Thou hast not been explicit with me, Fénelon.

FÉNELON.

Nay, madam, I have told thee all I know.

ELIZABETH.

But thou hast not.

FÉNELON.

What have I left unsaid ?

ELIZABETH.

A wondrous deal.

Thou hast not said what compensation I  
Shall have for the injury to his face.

FÉNELON.

Himself, good lady.

The hurt is disappearing rapidly,  
And soon his face will be as clear as thine;  
And as thine is the loveliest on earth,  
Thou canst not find a fault with his.

ELIZABETH.

It cannot be.

Small-pox is never cured.

FÉNELON.

Pardon, madam,

But hast thou evidence of this ?

ELIZABETH.

I have been told by skilful men.

FÉNELON.

Then, they have told thee lies. It is not so.  
In France it is a common cure, and there  
Is one who hath attained great skill in this.  
'Tis he attends on my good master.

ELIZABETH.

I would that thou couldst bring him over here.

FÉNELON.

I'll try, sweet lady.  
Thou wilt be pleased with him. Apart from this  
He is a worthy man.

ELIZABETH.

Thy master, too, is short, and I am tall.

FÉNELON.

'Tis very well.  
He cannot be thy master, then, for thou  
Couldst rule him easily.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis said he hath a big and ugly mouth.

FÉNELON.

It is a lie.  
'Tis true, his mouth is not so beautiful  
As thine, for thine is perfect, yet it is  
A mouth that would not sour thy kisses.

ELIZABETH.

His legs are crooked, too.

FÉNELON.

I know not, lady, who hath told thee this,  
But he had crooked eyes.

ELIZABETH.

And, then, he hath a monstrous head.

FÉNELON.

But 'tis not empty, madam, thou'lt confess.

ELIZABETH.

I have my doubts of it.

FÉNELON.

What ! after all he's written to thee ? Thou hast  
Confessed his thoughts and words are beautiful.  
Doth beauty grow in barren ground ?

ELIZABETH.

But words are easily writ.

FÉNELON.

True, madam.

But 'tis not given to every man to write  
In language choice and beautiful. It is  
A gift of bounteous Nature, and of which  
She's sparing, too.

ELIZABETH.

I would that I had such a gift!

FÉNELON.

Thou canst not doubt thy own rare skill, sweet  
lady!

I can assure thee thou art envied greatly  
By all who long to be admired for  
Their grace of diction.

ELIZABETH.

This is but flattery.

FÉNELON.

If truth is flattery, I grant it, lady.  
If it is flattering the sun to say  
He doth impart the greatest warmth and light,  
We speak but truthfully, and so I speak  
The truth in saying that thy eloquence  
Is rare and wonderful, and doth entrance  
The heart of him who hears thee speak and reads  
The words thou writest.

ELIZABETH.

As I grow old—and I am old, God knows—  
I feel the skill and beauty I possessed  
When young are slipping rapidly away.

FÉNELON.

It is thy great humility, good lady.  
 Thou art as humble as thou'rt beautiful  
 And wise. It is so in God's world. 'Tis they  
 On whom He hath bestowed the greatest gifts  
 Who are less conscious of their precious worth.  
 In every priceless gift thou shinest, yet  
 Thou art most humble. Were it otherwise,  
 Thou wouldst not be so loved and worshipped.

ELIZABETH.

Yet it is nature's law that beauty fades  
 As age creeps on.

FÉNELON.

Most true ;  
 And that doth evidence that by divine  
 Protecting Providence thou art used kindly.  
 For thee the laws of nature are reversed :  
 The older thou dost get—for thou canst not  
 Expect to live thy youthful days again—  
 More beautiful thou seem'st to be ; so none  
 Can wonder why men love thee so.

[*Exeunt both.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Westminster. A room in the Palace.*

*Enter QUEEN ELIZABETH, alone.*

ELIZABETH.

Ah, marriage!

It is a joy that I shall never know.  
The time for best enjoying it is past.  
I wear a crown, indeed, but not the crown  
Of happiness. I've let the years slip by  
Of indecision and of playing with the love  
I could have had, and now I taste the fruit—  
Most bitter fruit—of what I sowed. They say  
I am most wise. Ha! ha! If I'd been wise,  
I would have seen old age creep on and gloom.  
That is not wisdom that doth ever gaze  
On passing beauty, and doth shut its eyes  
To Nature's ugliness. They flatter me  
To say I'm wise. I gaze upon my youth  
As one doth gaze upon a fairy land

In dreams : it is receding from my view,  
 And in its place a dreary solitude  
 Doth rise, o'er which I have to travel. Alas !  
 Sweet company could cheer me on. I fear  
 To tread so dark a path alone. O God !  
 I do repent me now of ill-spent youth.

*Enter KATE ASHLEY.*

Ah, Kate ! thou lov'st me well ?

KATE ASHLEY.

What means your majesty ? Thou canst not  
 doubt  
 My love for thee ?

ELIZABETH.

I would that all could love me as dost thou ;  
 And yet I cannot hope for it. Ah, Kate !  
 I may command, and they may not refuse  
 To do. 'Twere wise of them ; but I have not  
 The power to command their love. Alas !  
 I cannot read their hearts. I would I could,  
 For I should read strange language there.

KATE ASHLEY.

Thou canst not make them love thee, it is true,  
 If they prefer to hate thee, yet thou dost  
 Possess the wondrous skill to read their hearts.

It is a gift which God hath given to thee,  
Along with other gifts divine.

ELIZABETH.

Thou hast no evidence of this.

KATE ASHLEY.

Yea, overwhelming evidence, sweet lady.  
I've seen and heard thee speak to many men,  
Who did protest their mighty love for thee ;  
And yet thou didst lay ope their very hearts,  
And found it written there that they had love  
For no one but themselves. Then I have seen  
How others would have urged thee to a deed  
Of monstrous cruelty, because 'twould save  
Thyself and throne—because 'twas just, indeed.  
And then most skilfully thou madest them all  
Confess they sought their own most selfish ends.  
Yea, many instances I could sum up  
To prove thy wondrous skill.

ELIZABETH.

I little thought, sweet Kate,  
I was observed with such intent by thee.  
Come, tell me, dost thou think that I am loved ?

KATE ASHLEY.

I cannot doubt it, madam.  
Who could not love so kind and sweet a creature?

It were a heart of stone, unnatural,  
That could not love thee. Yea, I warrant me,  
Such hearts are rare in England now. It is  
Confessed by all thou art a worthy queen,  
And dost deserve to rule a mighty land.

ELIZABETH.

I thank thee, Kate,  
For such sweet words. They're curing medicine  
For aching grief.

KATE ASHLEY.

Why dost thou grieve?

ELIZABETH.

Because 'tis natural. Dost think that queens  
Should never grieve?

KATE ASHLEY.

Alas!

I know that all are heirs to it. Methinks  
Thou hast enough to make thee grieve.

ELIZABETH.

Indeed, I have, my Kate.  
I have a heavy weight to bear. Alas!  
I often think my strength will not last out,  
And that 'twill drag me down.

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, never fear.  
Thou hast around thee willing, trusty aids,  
To help thee bear thy burden.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, Kate,  
I have suspicion of them all. I'll trust  
Myself. If I'm too feeble to support  
My kingdom, they will never prop it up.  
The legs would be unequal, Kate, and so  
The kingdom would be bent in many shapes.  
The longer props would kick the shorter down,  
Until the whole would fall and ruin them.  
I'd grieve for thee, sweet Kate, if I should die.

KATE ASHLEY.

But thou wilt live for many years.

ELIZABETH.

Pray God I shall!  
I would not like to die.

*Enter* LADY SHEFFIELD *and* FRANCES HOWARD.

What message bear ye, ladies? For I see  
'Tis burdensome.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

It is, sweet lady, for it doth affect  
The life of one good man, who loves thee well.

FRANCES HOWARD.

Yea, deeper than the loud-toned love of some.

ELIZABETH.

I love all those who truthfully love me.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Pray be it so for this poor man, for I  
Will swear his love is truth itself.

ELIZABETH.

Thou art no feeble advocate, indeed.  
Come, tell me who it is.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Thy noble vice-chamberlain, who's sick to death  
Because thou wilt not smile on him.

FRANCES HOWARD.

He longs to have a gracious word from thee  
Before he dies.

ELIZABETH.

Poor lids !

And is he stricken so ?

FRANCES HOWARD.

Yea, lady ;  
He cannot rise from off his bed.

ELIZABETH.

And all for love of me ?

FRANCES HOWARD.

For love of thee.

ELIZABETH.

Poor sheep !  
And doth he feel himself a wanderer,  
And little cared for ?

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Yea, lady ;  
Far from the fold he loves, where he deserves  
To be, far more than many there.

FRANCES HOWARD.

Where there are many wolves in sheep's disguise.

ELIZABETH.

I'll write to him.  
I know he loves me truly, though he is  
A jealous-minded man. I'd grieve most deeply  
If he should die for want of my sad smiles.

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LADY SHEFFIELD.

Sad smiles, indeed! Who says thy smiles are  
sad?

FRANCES HOWARD.

He hath an evil eye who told thee so.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis said my smiles are sad.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

It is not true, sweet lady, for thy smiles  
Are sorrow-curers, bringers of deep joy.

FRANCES HOWARD.

They lighten dreary lives.

ELIZABETH.

Pray, tell him I forgive him all his rashness,  
And ask him come again.

BOTH.

We thank thee, gracious majesty.

*[Exeunt ladies.]*

ELIZABETH.

There's one who loves me, Kate, to whom I've  
done  
A cruel wrong.

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay, thou hast not.  
He doth deserve it all.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, dost thou think so ?

KATE ASHLEY.

He did presume too much upon thy love.  
Nay, even if ye looked at other men  
He censured thee. That was not gratitude.  
He's reaping now what he hath sown, and thou  
Hast acted wisely.

ELIZABETH.

And dost thou think I've punished him enough ?

KATE ASHLEY.

'Twould do no harm  
To have him near thee once again.

ELIZABETH.

I'll have him, Kate,  
For I do sorrow for him much.

KATE ASHLEY.

Thou hast a gentle heart.

ELIZABETH.

I would I had a gentler, Kate.

*Enter* LA MOTTE FÉNELON.

But who comes here? Pray leave me for awhile.

KATE ASHLEY (*aside*).

I hate this sly ambassador.  
He hath no goodly mission here. [*Exit* KATE.]

FÉNELON.

Good-morrow, gentle lady.

ELIZABETH.

Good-morrow, Fénelon.  
I hope thou hast good news.

FÉNELON.

Nay, I have not, sweet lady.  
I bring depressing news.

ELIZABETH.

Well, out with it.

FÉNELON.

My master is weary of delay.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, sir,  
He's too impatient; he must curb his love.

FÉNELON.

Must curb his love ?  
What dost thou ask ? Can love be curbed ? I  
thought  
It was no bridled horse.

ELIZABETH.

Then learn from me  
It can be curbed. Necessity is that  
Which Nature's laws may teach.

FÉNELON.

If love is curbed with ease, I doubt its truth.  
'Tis very weak, at least.

ELIZABETH.

True love is proved  
By how it lasts, and how it fights against  
The stress of circumstance. The longer it  
Doth love, the greater strength it has.  
How is thy master ?

FÉNELON.

Quite love-sick, madam.

ELIZABETH.

Such sickness can be easily cured.

FÉNELON.

Nay, madam ;

He hath a serious attack, indeed,  
Beyond the skill of man to cure. It is  
A sickness unto death. 'Tis thou alone  
Who hath the power to rouse him up.

ELIZABETH.

What power have I ?  
Am I the only queen in this great world ?

FÉNELON.

Nay, canst thou ask ?  
Thou art the only queen whom he could love.  
Thou art the only queen who doth deserve  
Such love as he can give. Thou art so wise,  
So beautiful, so virtuous, so gentle,  
That loving thee is wondrous natural.  
It seems beyond our power to treat thee other  
Than worshipping and loving thee. If thus  
Thy nature doth attract the love of all,  
Pray think how it would quickly, strongly grow  
In my poor master's heart.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Fénelon,  
Thou art no feeble advocate of thy  
Poor master. Pray, tell him this from me, that I

Feel sure of his deep love for me ; that I  
Am grateful for such honest, noble love ;  
And that it shall not live without reward.

FÉNELON.

I thank thee, lady.  
Thy message will revive him much, but not  
To perfect joy. I would that thou couldst give  
Much surer hope.

ELIZABETH.

I cannot.

Be satisfied with what I've said.

FÉNELON.

I will, fair lady.

[*Exit* FÉNELON.]

ELIZABETH.

Methinks that love is growing in my heart  
For this wise prince. Nay, I am sure of it.  
I long to marry him, but that I fear  
The nation will not sanction it. 'Twould rise  
In anger 'gainst a prince who hates the Church  
My subjects love. That is the obstacle  
I know not how to overcome. My council  
Would fan the flame into a fearful blaze  
I dread would scorch my throne. The only way  
To gain my ends would be to bribe them all

With promises of favour and reward.  
 Refusal shall but hurl them to disgrace,  
 Which they will dread more than my marriage  
     with  
 The prince they hate. I'll let no time slip by  
 Ere I commence the task. [Exit.]

SCENE II.—*A street in London. Enter Two*  
*GENTLEMEN in conversation.*

1ST GENT.

I've heard but little of the news; if thou dost  
 know much more, I beg thou wouldst enlighten  
 me.

2ND GENT.

Thou know'st that something terrible hath  
 stirred the minds of all, and that the faces thou  
 dost see bespeak some poignant grief?

1ST GENT.

I've never seen the citizens so sorrowful in my  
 time, friend.

2ND GENT.

Nor hast thou ever heard of such a fiendish  
 crime. Pray God it is the worst and last!

1ST GENT.

I'll share thy wish if thou wilt give me cause for it.

2ND GENT.

I'll give thee most abundant cause for it. The infidel and devilish King and Queen of France did butcher, on St. Bartholomew's day, all the Protestants in their homes. 'Twas done by serpent stealth, when they were helpless and unable to defend themselves. O God! how canst thou let such fiends live?

1ST GENT.

Thou needst might ask, my friend. His ways are wondrous strange.

2ND GENT.

No doubt He'll punish them in time.

1ST GENT.

I hope He'll burn them with hell-fire. [*Exeunt.*

*Enter SUSSEX and BURLEIGH.*

BURLEIGH.

No deed could better serve our ends or damn Their own. They are their own worst enemies. The queen will never countenance so great And deep a crime; the nation's hate will be

Increased, and less and less they'll be inclined  
To favour marriage with this ugly prince.  
The storm I see is rising now will soon  
Become a whirlwind which she dare not face.  
For my own part, I'm glad on it.

SUSSEX.

And I am deeply sorrowful.

BURLEIGH.

And why, my lord ?

SUSSEX.

So many murdered innocents is cause  
For grief.

BURLEIGH.

But it will save our country and our queen.

SUSSEX.

Salvation based upon a hideous crime  
Is an unnatural fruit, and shares the fate  
Of all misgendered things—a useless life  
And speedy death.

BURLEIGH.

Thou'rt in thy quiet, thinking mood to-day.  
To-morrow thou'lt think different.

SUSSEX.

I'd rather let them wed than have a crime  
So terrible an obstacle.

BURLEIGH.

That he may murder us! Nay, Sussex, nay.  
Thou art not serious?

SUSSEX.

I am, indeed,  
Most serious.

BURLEIGH.

It is a serious dream.

SUSSEX.

We'll see; we'll see.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*A room in* SIR CHRISTOPHER  
HATTON'S *house.*

*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON *and* WHITLEY.

HATTON.

Ah, I'm a happy man to-day, good Whitley.

WHITLEY.

I'm glad thou'rt in a joyous mood, but I've  
Grave doubts how long 'twill last.

HATTON.

Until I die, good man.  
The clouds of her ill-will have passed away,  
And now the glorious sun doth shine.

WHITLEY.

But other clouds may come.

HATTON.

Nay, Whitley.  
I see none coming on. Yea, what I see  
Is one expanse of brilliant sky.

WHITLEY.

And this in spite of her too changeful mood ?

HATTON.

Yea, in spite of that.  
Methinks her moods are not so changeable.  
They may appear so, but when thou dost think  
Of all the varied natures she must please,  
She needs must show a varied nature, too.  
We think she's changeable because she has  
So many rare and wondrous gifts.

WHITLEY.

But didst thou think so when she cast thee off ?

HATTON.

I own, good Whitley, I was wrong. I own  
That I deserved such punishment. I am  
A jealous-minded man, and when I see  
She favours others whom I think would do  
Her wrong, my anger urges me to speak  
My mind. I have no mastery o'er myself,  
And when too late I grieve. Indeed, I see  
She hath been merciful to me. If others  
Had done what I have done ; had shown the  
spleen

That I have shown ; had uttered words that I  
Have said, they'd be bemoaning in the Tower ;  
Whereas the greatest punishment that she  
Hath meted out to me is banishment  
From her sweet face, although I cannot bear  
E'en that. But I'm to gaze on it again.  
And with what joy I'll kiss her hand once more !  
How zealous I shall be to please her well !  
How sharp a curb I'll keep on jealousy  
And anger ! How guarded shall my language  
be !

I would not suffer o'er again the days  
Of sorrow and of gloom which now are o'er !

[*Exeunt* HATTON and WHITLEY.]

SCENE IV.—*A room in the house of the COUNTESS OF ESSEX.*

*Enter the COUNTESS OF ESSEX, alone.*

I sometimes feel he'll never marry me,  
In spite of that great love he doth protest.  
He'd risk too much. The queen would banish  
him

Beyond forgiveness ; yea, would hate us both,  
And thrust us in the Tower to drag our lives  
Apart. She is a selfish, cruel queen,  
Ungrateful, undeserving faithful love,  
For she would never let us know its joy.  
How many young and hopeful lives hath she  
Destroyed, because they married 'gainst her wish !  
Should we escape her rage and spleen ? Nay,  
nay !

But yet my love would risk it all.

*Enter LEICESTER.*

My queen ! (*Kisses her.*)

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Am I thy queen indeed ? Nay, hast thou not  
Mistaken me ?

LEICESTER.

Ah, jealous still ? Thou hast no need to be ;  
I have not given thee cause.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Forgive me, Dudley. Thou canst understand.  
I hear so much of how she favours thee  
That I must needs be envious.

LEICESTER.

She'd be more envious if she could read  
My heart.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

What would she read there, Dudley?

LEICESTER.

Dost thou not know? 'Tis not concealed from  
thee.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Nay, I am blind. Pray, read it me.

LEICESTER.

That I love none but thee. That thou alone  
Wilt be my wife.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Why do they say thou'lt marry the queen?

LEICESTER.

Who say so lie. I'll never marry her.  
She doth already know the one she'll wed.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Pray, whom ?

LEICESTER.

The Duc d'Alençon.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Nay ?

LEICESTER.

She is resolved to marry him.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

I thought she hated ugly men.

LEICESTER.

She doth, but somehow she believes he's not  
So ugly as reports would make him be.  
Indeed, she says he is a handsome man,  
A wise and noble prince, and worthy her.  
La Motte hath filled her mind with all these lies,  
And she hath great regard for him. Who tries  
To tell her truth doth run great risk, for she  
Doth silence him with threats.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

The country will be sorely grieved at this,  
For it will be in bondage to the Pope.

LEICESTER.

My policy will be  
To urge this marriage on. 'Twill please the  
queen,  
And court the favour of our future king.  
I'm now resolved to marry thee at once,  
If thou'lt consent.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

With all my heart.  
But wilt thou let her know?

LEICESTER.

Nay, nay!  
We'll wed in secrecy, unknown to her.  
If she had knowledge of it, sweet, the joys  
Of married life would be but short.

COUNTESS OF ESSEX.

Alas! they would.

SCENE V.—*An apartment in the Palace.*

*Enter ELIZABETH and FÉNELON.*

ELIZABETH.

I'm grieved at heart.  
Wouldst thou extenuate so base a deed?  
Thou art as bad as they.

FÉNELON.

Indeed, sweet lady,  
Thou canst not be so grieved as I, or they.  
My king and queen hath done this evil deed,  
And now are suffering torments terrible ;  
Yea, such a grief I fear will drive them mad.  
I pray thee, let this have full weight with thee  
In judging them. It was excess of zeal,  
Of love of God, that urged them to remove  
Whom they regarded as His bitterest foes.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, nay !  
They know that God doth never countenance  
The wholesale slaughter of His children whom  
He loves. Another motive urged them on.  
Dost think they would invite the hate and scorn,  
The horror of the world through love of God ?  
Alas ! our love for Him is not so deep.  
True love for God gives birth to deeds of peace.  
I know thy mistress and thy master well,  
And know they're both ambitious.

FÉNELON.

And what is their ambition, my good lady ?  
'Tis to promote the welfare of the Church

They love ; to make the country which they rule,  
The people whom they govern, great and vast.  
Is that a natural desire for kings  
And queens ? Is it a selfish one ? Dost thou  
Not wish to serve thy country well ? Indeed,  
Wouldst thou be fit to govern if thou hadst  
No hope and wish of such a noble kind ?  
No man could call thee selfish, nay, could not  
Describe thee scornfully as most ambitious.  
Then I would ask thee, lady, not to judge  
My mistress too untenderly.

ELIZABETH.

I judge them far more tenderly than they  
Have judged the victims of their rage. Dost  
think  
The greatness of a nation is secure  
When built upon a hideous crime ? Nay, that  
Prosperity will grow on fetid soil ?  
Can drinking human blood impart deep joy ?  
Yea, Fénelon, those are the truest kings  
And queens who would promote the nation's  
good ;  
But they are truer far when they promote  
And base it on good deeds. Thy mistress sets  
Her kingdom up on soil in which 'twill sink  
Much lower down than e'er it was before.

FÉNELON.

I do confess  
They have been blind and acted foolishly,  
But which of us hath never erred, and who  
Hath never known what blindness is? There  
comes

A time in each man's life when he is blind,  
And moves in darkness, stumbling on his way  
To find the light. Some chance on it by luck,  
But others see a glimmer in the gloom  
For which they steer; but e'er they reach it  
down

They fall, in deeper darkness still. So hath  
My mistress been deceived, and so is she  
Now struggling in the gloom and with the fears  
That it doth breed. 'Twere nobler if we lent  
A tender help to bring her forth from there,  
Than force her further down. Methinks that  
God

Doth make us blind at times, that we may give  
An opportunity for every man  
To guide us right, and he who guides us wrong,  
Or without pity lets us go astray,  
Doth sin most grievously.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis truly spoken.  
I'll think it o'er, yea, I will think it o'er.

I would ye left me now, that I may spend  
My time in thought.

FÉNELON.

I will, sweet lady.

Thy nature is so kind and merciful,  
That I feel sure thou wilt with tenderness  
Regard this hasty deed.

[*Exit* FÉNELON.]

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Fénelon,

Thou think'st that thou hast conquered me. 'Tis  
well !

But thou wilt be deceived e'er long, poor man !

To thy discomfiture. I'll use thee first,

Because I find in thee a useful tool ;

But when thou'rt done with I can cast thee off.

'Tis thou art blind, though thou dost think,  
with no

Slight scorn of me, that it is I. I'll ope

Thy eyes in time, but in a way thou'lt least

Expect. I will not quarrel with thy king

And queen ! Nay, nay ! I know a wiser move.

Blind ! He who shuts his eyes, then stabs his foe,

Is blind ? Dost think I am a child ? God's  
death !

I'll child thee, upstart ! thou wilt find, too late,

Thou hast a queen to deal with, who can shut  
Her eyes to strike a blow at him she hates.

*Enter BURLEIGH.*

Ha ! my lord Cecil.

BURLEIGH.

Thou didst send for me, good lady ?

ELIZABETH.

Come, sit thee down,  
And let us seriously talk. What dost thou think  
Of this vile murder done in France ?

BURLEIGH.

What dost thou think of it ?

ELIZABETH.

I wish to know thy thoughts,  
Not tell thee mine.

BURLEIGH.

Indeed, fair madam,  
I know not what to think of it.

ELIZABETH.

Thou dost not know ?  
Come, speak thy mind, for thou dost surely know  
How thou dost look on it.

BURLEIGH.

Yea,

I know how I do look on it, but what  
To think on it I do not know.

ELIZABETH.

How dost thou look on it ?

BURLEIGH.

With horror, lady.

ELIZABETH.

Most natural, indeed.

And so thy thoughts must be allied ?

BURLEIGH.

I am divided in my thoughts.

ELIZABETH.

Pray, what divides them, man ?

BURLEIGH.

The weakness of mankind.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, is thy brain so weak ?

BURLEIGH.

Nay, madam,

It is no jesting time.

ELIZABETH.

Then tell me, Cecil,  
Have they not done a most unpardonable crime,  
And thus deserved our hate?

BURLEIGH.

Methinks they have;  
A crime I'll never pardon.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, say not so.

BURLEIGH.

I'd say it with my dying breath.

ELIZABETH.

Thou couldst not, Cecil.

BURLEIGH.

And why, I pray?

ELIZABETH.

Because thou hast a most forgiving heart.

BURLEIGH.

I have, indeed,  
But not for such a crime.

ELIZABETH.

For such a crime, I say.

BURLEIGH.

Methinks I never could.

ELIZABETH.

Ha !

Thou dost not know of what thou'rt capable ;  
But I know well.

BURLEIGH.

Thou hast more knowledge of my heart than I.

ELIZABETH.

I have, indeed.

But I would speak to thee more seriously,  
Yet in a place more secret than this room ;  
So come with me.

*[Exeunt ELIZABETH and BURLEIGH.]*

*Enter LADY SHEFFIELD and FRANCES HOWARD.*

FRANCES HOWARD.

Yea, if I knew it I would tell her straight.  
I'd drag him down.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

And yet, methinks, he'd never risk it.

FRANCES HOWARD.

Methinks he would.

If I were told to-morrow he had married  
The countess, it would not surprise me.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Nay!

FRANCES HOWARD.

The Earl of Leicester, as we know, is sly  
And crafty, but there is a way to snare  
The fox. But here comes Kate.

*Enter* KATE ASHLEY.

Good-morrow, Kate!

KATE ASHLEY.

Good-morrow, ladies; what's abroad?

FRANCES HOWARD.

The Earl of Leicester's married.

KATE ASHLEY.

Nay!

FRANCES HOWARD.

'Tis true.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Nay, Kate;

'Tis but a rumour we have heard.

FRANCES HOWARD.

But rumours are most often true.

KATE ASHLEY.

Yea, yea.

But he would never dare to marry.

FRANCES HOWARD.

What dost thou know he'd dare?

KATE ASHLEY.

I know he'd never dare to vex the queen,  
As he hath done before.

FRANCES HOWARD.

How could he vex her if she knew it not?

KATE ASHLEY.

True.

But if it reaches thee, the world will know,  
And thus her majesty will hear of it.

FRANCES HOWARD.

I hope she will, indeed.

She'll make his joy short-lived.

KATE ASHLEY.

Ah!

I have no sympathy for him. He is  
A man who forfeits love.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

He is an overweening wretch, a cur,  
A puppet ; nor care I who kicks him down.

FRANCES HOWARD.

He will be kicked, ere long,  
And most ungently, too.

*[Exeunt the three ladies.]*

*Re-enter ELIZABETH and BURLEIGH.*

ELIZABETH.

What matter what my subjects think ? Should  
they

Dictate to thee or me our every act ?

What use are kings and queens, indeed, if they  
Must only do what meets their subjects' wish ?

What can the rabble know or see ? What can

They reason out ? Nay, could they tell thee what

They fear, if I should wed the duke ? They cry

Aloud like children in the dark, because

They see a seeming shadow there. I say,

They have been taught and urged to make this  
noise

By those whom I've marked out. Nay, I will  
wed,

If only to revenge myself on them.

I know thou hast no cowardly fear. I know

Why thou dost dread my marriage with the  
prince—

Because thou think'st he is not worthy me.

Nay, Cecil, rid thyself of such a fear.

He is a noble, pious prince and can

Become a goodly king. So rest secure,

And in the council aid my cause. I will

Reward thee as thou wilt deserve.

BURLEIGH.

I fear, sweet lady,

My task will be a sorry one in face

Of such great odds.

ELIZABETH.

The better for thee.

Thou'lt have me on thy side ; what matter then

Who cries thee down ? I will reward thee first,

And make them envious.

BURLEIGH.

Nay, nay.

They'd scorn me more, indeed.

ELIZABETH.

Well, I will do

As thou dost wish. So thou hast promised me

To help my marriage on. I'll not forget,

And will expect to see thee bravely fight.

[*Exit* ELIZABETH.]

BURLEIGH.

Yea, I am in a sorry plight, indeed.  
 I dread this marriage, and I hate this prince,  
 And yet I'm pledged to favour both. O God!  
 I would I were a simple subject, not  
 A minister besieged and tossed about  
 By woman's whims! I daily fall in snares  
 Which she doth cover o'er and make attractive.  
 I would that I were far away from here,  
 And treading on much surer ground. Alas!  
 I've ventured in this treacherous land, and must  
 Abide it yet awhile. I'll earn the scorn  
 Of all the world. But yet what can I do?  
 No man could envy me. I am a poor  
 And martyred wretch.

[*Exit* BURLEIGH.]

SCENE VI.—*France. A garden at the Castle of  
 Blois.*

*Enter* CATHERINE and CHARLES IX.

CATHERINE.

What dost thou fear?  
 Thou hast a craven heart.

CHARLES.

Our crime hath met the horror of the world.  
All Christendom doth look on us with dread  
And fright, and those who loved us once and our  
Dear country hate us with undying hate.

CATHERINE.

Then let them hate.  
Our Pope and God doth love us still.

CHARLES.

Ah, mother,  
Thou art an enigma to me.

CATHERINE.

To thee, no doubt,  
Because thou hast not intellect enough  
To reason out the simplest things.

CHARLES.

This murder is no simple thing——

CATHERINE.

Murder  
Pray, call it what it is—a pious act.

CHARLES.

I'll call it, then, a pious act. I well  
Can see this pious act will drag us down.

We shall be looked upon by all the world  
As though we're scorpions.

CATHERINE.

Nay.

I know the world, my son. I know it well.  
I knew it would be horrified, but yet  
Not deeply so. It will ere long forget  
What we have done. Its selfishness will cure  
What it doth suffer now ; and when it sees  
That hatred will not bring prosperity,  
Nor will preserve it from its enemies,  
It will return to love. Now, son, what is  
The worth of all its love or hate ? Is it  
As true as is the Pope's, as strong and deep  
As God's ? Is it not hate and selfishness  
Disguised ? 'Tis cowardice, my son, that would  
Commit as great a crime if it but had  
The courage. Here comes thy brother ; he, as I,  
Doth glory in this deed.

*Enter ALENÇON.*

Nay, dost thou not ?

ALENÇON.

What dost thou ask ?

CATHERINE.

Thou dost regard it as a glorious deed  
To rid our country of these heretics ?

ALENÇON.

It is a deed o'er which we may rejoice  
With most unbounded joy. Why dost thou ask,  
And doubt my ecstasy?

CATHERINE.

'Tis but to rouse thy brother up, for he  
Doth suffer from some nervous fear.

ALENÇON.

Come, brother,  
 Why wear such gloomy looks?    Thou shouldst  
     be glad  
 And full of happiness, for thou art rid  
 Of thy most bitter foes.

CHARLES.

To make more bitter enemies.

CATHERINE.

He's past all cure.  
I'll physic him no more. No medicine  
Will make the coward brave.

ALENÇON.

Nay;

Nor will the deed I contemplate remove  
His gloominess.

CATHERINE.

What is it, son?

ALENÇON.

When I am King of England I'll remove  
By fire and sword those other heretics,  
Who else will shake my throne, and make my life  
Too insecure for peace of mind. 'Twill be  
Another means to serve the Pope and God,  
And set my country on a firmer base.  
What matter though they hate us now, and wish  
To ruin us? Their hate shall be short-lived.  
Their foolish, love-sick queen shall be the means  
Which shall destroy them utterly.

CATHERINE.

Bravo, my son!

I would thy brother were as brave as thou,  
And were as true a king, as bold and fearless  
A champion of his Church. Yea, thou shalt be  
Thy country's true deliverer, whom France  
Shall honour as a God. My noble son!

My pious, Christian son ! Yea, I rejoice  
I gave thee birth, for thou hast blest my womb  
Which bare thee, which thy brother else had  
    cursed.

I would ye left me here awhile. I love  
The solitude in which my thoughts alone  
Are my most sweet companions.

ALENÇON.

I know it, mother.  
I'll go and leave thee to thyself awhile.  
[*Exeunt* CHARLES and ALENÇON.]

CATHERINE.

Ah, life is strange and wondrous curious !  
It lures us on by holding up far-off  
Rewards whose glory dazzles us. Alas !  
How eager are we all to get them in  
Our grasp ! Our eyes are fixed on these alone,  
Nor scarcely see the obstacles which strew  
The path that leads to them. The paths which  
    some  
Must tread present far greater obstacles  
Than hinder others, and demand more strength  
And will to overcome them with success.  
Such is my path, and I've displayed, indeed,  
No common firmness in surmounting what

Would hinder me, yet where is my reward?  
 Where is that dazzling, brilliant prize I saw  
 When I set out? As when the sun doth shine  
 And make most objects glisten in its light  
 At distance off, but when we come quite close  
 The brilliance disappears, so hath the prize  
 Which drew me on quite vanished from my view.  
 I thought when I had rid belovèd France  
 Of these damned Protestants I should be free,  
 And know true peace of mind. Alas! the world  
 Seems duller, darker still, nor do I know  
 The peace which once I did enjoy. O Life!  
 Thy hopes are mere delusions, yea, methinks,  
 The false and treacherous beauty which allures  
 The traveller on, which decks and makes attractive  
 The pitfalls into which he falls at last.

[*Exit.*

SCENE VII.—*A street in London. Enter SUSSEX  
 and HATTON, in conversation.*

SUSSEX.

Nay, I am not surprised.  
 Our nature's made of such elastic stuff  
 That those who will may stretch it out to lengths  
 As suit their purpose best.

HATTON.

*Our nature ?*

Why dost thou thus include thyself and me ?

SUSSEX.

Yea, even thou and I are very weak,  
And if we were in Burleigh's place, no doubt,  
Would do as he.

HATTON.

But thou and I both sacrifice a deal  
To act in opposition to the queen ;  
And yet we have refused our aid to bring  
This hateful marriage off.

SUSSEX.

I cannot judge him harshly, Chris, for he  
Hath great excuse. Poor man ! I know how  
    Bess  
Would wheedle him and touch his gentle heart  
With strong entreaty and with honeyed words.  
She knows where he is weak, and where he's  
    strong  
More deeply than thyself or I. She is  
A skilful player on the human heart,  
And Burleigh's is an easy instrument.

HATTON.

She cannot play on thine and mine with such  
Great skill, and so successfully.

SUSSEX.

Be not so sure, my friend.  
I've seen the time when thou thyself hast piped  
Music both sweet and harsh as she hath bid ;  
And I confess I've yielded to her skill  
As uncontrollably. Maybe, at last,  
We'll urge this marriage on.

HATTON.

Never, Sussex !  
I'd rather see her buried than the spouse  
Of such an ugly and deformed a wretch.  
Oh, God ! that she should come to wed the son  
Of such a monstrous mother ! Think of it,  
My lord, and say if Heaven could look on it  
With fav'ring eyes !

SUSSEX.

It could not, Chris ;  
But yet how many things are done on earth  
Which please our God ? I dread this marriage—  
yea,  
No man could dread it more—and yet I am  
So weak that I may lend my aid at last.

HATTON.

I'm sure thou never wilt.

SUSSEX.

I know my weakness best.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*An apartment in the Palace at Westminster.* ELIZABETH and KATE ASHLEY discovered.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Kate,  
Love plays with us strange pranks. We think  
we've fixed  
Our love on one, and placed him on a height  
Which others could not reach, when, as we gaze,  
And seem content and sure of our great love,  
The latter cools we know not how ; we know  
Not when, indeed, till suddenly it seems  
Most icy cold. We turn from him we loved  
With discontent and scorn, almost with hate.  
It is a law of nature, my sweet Kate,  
Which greatly puzzles me.

KATE ASHLEY (*aside*).

Praise God !

It is confined to thee alone, else love  
Would breed but universal grief.

ELIZABETH.

Methought I loved the prince with deeper love,  
But now I could not marry him if he  
Were perfect. Tell me, Kate, what says the  
world  
Of my resolve to have no more of him ?

KATE ASHLEY.

It doth rejoice  
Most merrily.

ELIZABETH.

And is it pleased  
With what I've done ?

KATE ASHLEY.

In every town and village everyone  
Doth weep for joy and laud thee to the skies.

ELIZABETH.

I'm glad on it.  
Methinks that even I could weep for joy.  
What cause do they assign for it ?

KATE ASHLEY.

They think that thou hast sacrificed thyself  
For love of them and of thy country. Thus,  
They almost worship thee.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis well, my Kate.  
'Tis well they cannot guess the truer cause.

KATE ASHLEY (*aside*).

'Tis well, indeed,  
And yet 'twere better if it knew thou hadst  
A mood less changeable.

ELIZABETH.

Go, Kate ;  
Prepare my room and books for me. Methinks  
I'll read awhile. [*Exit KATE ASHLEY.*

Yea, it is well.  
I'm glad, indeed, to hear that ye rejoice.  
I grudge it not, although it is not love  
For ye that gives ye cause. This mirth would  
cease  
If ye could know my love for Leicester is  
As strong as e'er it was ; that I'm resolved  
To marry him—yea, marry him, in spite  
Of all your tears and fears and threats. Are ye

Alone to have this happiness? Must I  
Grow old and die, and never know the love  
Of husband and of child? Nay, must I love,  
But, unlike ye, be forced to stifle it?  
Is it the penalty of being a queen  
That I must bear no fruit to beautify  
And cheer fast-growing age? It cannot be;  
I have not strength or will to make it be.

[*Exit* ELIZABETH.]

*Enter* LEICESTER.

A sorry plight!

I'm in no sorry plight. 'Tis true I'm wed,  
And that's an obstacle which some would count  
Quite insurmountable, but not to me.  
I'll let no obstacle stand in my way  
To be the king. I'd risk my life for that.  
'Tis true I've been o'er-hasty, yet who thought  
The queen was not in earnest? She did seem  
Most deep in love—so deep, indeed, that I  
Could never hope to bring her out again.  
I'll warrant me that none can read her heart.  
She acts her part so well that none can tell  
If it is jest or no. Her love for me  
Is what she never acts. It is too real,  
Too strong, and hath defied too many storms,  
To be unsafe to trust. She would have wed  
Ere now but for this mighty obstacle,

160 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

Which she can never hope to overcome.  
Though I repent I did not wait to see  
The certain issue of this later love,  
Yet I can feel at perfect liberty  
To wed the queen.

*(He makes to go out, but the queen enters and)  
sees him.)*

ELIZABETH.

Nay, stay.

I long to speak with thee.

LEICESTER *(turning round)*.

Good-morrow, my good lady.

ELIZABETH.

How looks the world outside ?

LEICESTER.

Most cheerful, madam.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, very bright and full of hope ?

LEICESTER.

I see no speck of cloud to threaten storms.

ELIZABETH.

But clouds must come ere long.

LEICESTER.

'Twould be quite natural.

ELIZABETH.

Most threat'ning ones will come from France.

LEICESTER.

They'll never burst.

ELIZABETH.

Dost think they'll pass by harmlessly ?

LEICESTER.

They cannot do us injury.

ELIZABETH.

Why cannot they ?

LEICESTER.

Thy subjects' love would safely shelter thee  
If they should burst.

ELIZABETH.

But love is not all-powerful.

LEICESTER.

It is the powerfulest thing on earth.

ELIZABETH.

Thou hast no proof of it.

LEICESTER.

I have the proof of my undying love.  
 No storm, however fiercely it did rage,  
 Could crush my love for thee. Nay, think what  
     storms  
 It hath withstood, and have they injured it ?  
 Methinks 'tis stronger now than e'er it was.

ELIZABETH.

I know thou hadst deep love for me, my lord,  
 When I was young ; but now I'm growing old  
 Thy love must be less strong.

LEICESTER.

Yea, on my knees, I'll swear it is as true,  
 As strong, as when I knew thee first. Am I  
 Not growing old as thou, and can I hope  
 Once more to enjoy the love of youth ?  
 No maiden in her blushing teens could have  
 Attractions for me now. Why dost thou doubt,  
 After it has been tried these many years,  
 My love for thee is dying out ?

ELIZABETH.

Because love feeds on beauty, and as I  
 Have lost the beauty of my youth, so will  
 Thy love have naught to nurture it.

LEICESTER.

Love doth not feed on outward loveliness.  
'Tis true that fades, but inward beauty lives,  
And in old age doth reach its perfect state.  
Love feeds on virtue, truth, and piety,  
All which thou'rt perfect in. Where these are  
not  
True love can not exist. Nor hast thou lost,  
Indeed, the beauty of thy outward form.  
It doth improve as age creeps on. My love  
Need, therefore, never wither for the lack  
Of blessed food.

ELIZABETH.

We will be seen and heard if we stay here.  
Come, let us seek a more retired place,  
And speak our thoughts, nor fear intrusion.

LEICESTER.

With all my heart, sweet madam.

[*Exeunt* ELIZABETH and LEICESTER.]

*Enter* LA MOTTE FÉNELON and LORD SUSSEX.

FÉNELON.

No simple girl at school would act as she.  
They know their minds, at least, and what they  
like

And what they scorn, but your proud queen—  
 alas!

I wonder that ye live, and that she hath  
 The constancy to sit upon a throne.

SUSSEX.

Ah, Fénelon,

I understand the disappointment that  
 Ye suffer from, and sympathize with ye.  
 No doubt it is a bitter grief to all  
 In France that they have failed in their bold  
 schemes.

As doth the gambler feel, when he hath placed  
 At stake his own last coin, and loses it,  
 So must their sorrow be. Methinks they played  
 A far too hazardous game to hope to win.  
 Hate cannot clothe herself in Love's bright robes  
 And look quite natural. She must forget  
 At times she plays a part, and then she doth  
 Reveal unconsciously her decked-out self.

FÉNELON.

Whate'er my master did, he showed he had  
 A purpose in his heart, a constant mind,  
 A firm, determined will—all qualities  
 As rare and admirable as virtue's self.  
 Thy mistress hath not found him out. Her eyes  
 Are far too dull to notice his disguise.

Indeed, she doth believe he loves her yet,  
But she hath cast him off because she loves  
A life of coquetry. She's very like  
The butterfly that flies from flower to flower,  
In great unrest. This is no quality  
To rule a country great as England is.  
Methinks 'twill ruin it.

SUSSEX.

Ye need not fear, my lord.  
She hath no love for human blood. Methinks  
I'd rather be the subject of a queen  
Who had too soft a heart to put to death  
Her rival and her fiercest enemy,  
Than one who in cold blood, nor with remorse,  
Could murder innocents and loving subjects,  
Because they loved the Bible and their God,  
And longed to know the truth.

FÉNELON.

My lord is ignorant of whom he speaks.  
He doth not know their love of God and truth  
Did make them plot against the throne. My  
    mistress  
Removed in them most dangerous heretics,  
Who sought to ruin France and kill their king  
And queen. I knew not truth was best displayed  
By trait'rous acts. I thank my noble lord

For teaching me. He thus hath shown to me  
That falsehood is more beautiful than truth.

SUSSEX.

Ha ! ha !

Is that the reason why thou tellest lies ?  
And yet these falsehoods do not beautify  
Thy countenance. If I had taught thee this,  
Thou wouldst not so contort thy face, but look  
More loving, calm, and pleasant. Ah ! my lord  
Doth think he can deceive me as he did  
The queen.

FÉNELON (*aside*).

Curses on thee !

My God, I'll find a way to trip thee up.  
I'll make thy face less beautiful, or else  
I'll scorn myself.

[*Excunt both.*]

*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON.

By Jupiter ! I'll round on her. I'll speak  
My thoughts ; give utterance to the contempt  
I feel for her. I'll tell her with bold tongue  
That she's not fit to be a queen. To dangle,  
And lovingly caress before us all,  
This upstart Leicester is beyond my stock  
Of patience to behold composedly

And keep a silent tongue. I'll ope my mouth,  
By God ! and fiery words shall scorch her up.  
I would that I could burn him, too. I'll wait  
Until the devil has the task.

[*Exit* HATTON.]

SCENE II.—*Night. A country place.*

*Enter* LEICESTER (*disguised*).

Ah, Leicester, thou art not so bold a man  
As thou dost boast thyself to be, or else  
Why dost thou tremble so? What makes thee  
start  
At every little sound? what makes thee fear  
This talking solitude? Its silence seems  
To frown on me, and to reproach in tones  
Of holy innocence my deep-laid crime.  
I'd hold a parley with it if I dared,  
But I should fear to hear me speak. And yet  
I've gone too far to wrest the murderous hand.  
My wife will be in heaven ere long. The scheme  
Is too well laid to fear its non-success.  
And yet I love her ! she is worthy me.  
She is as virtuous as she is beautiful ;  
She is, indeed, a paragon of wives.  
I'd sound her praises with my dying breath.  
Yet I must kill her, for her living means

A life imprisonment for me, or death.  
I cannot sacrifice my life for hers,  
For she would never sacrifice herself  
For me. Is it not better she were dead,  
Than be deprived of me and liberty,  
And live a ling'ring, tortured life within  
The Tower? In killing her am I not kind?  
She'll die, at least, in painless innocence.  
For me I see, in spite of all its joys,  
A weary life. Where is that happy man  
Who drags a guilty conscience?

*Enter MURDERER.*

Thou com'st! Why dost thou drag thy steps?

MURDERER.

A heavy weight doth make them slow.

LEICESTER.

Come, cheer up, man.

Do all thy crimes affect thee thus?

MURDERER.

Nay, otherwise.

LEICESTER.

What dost thou mean?

MURDERER.

They give me speed.

LEICESTER.

Then, why has this not quickened thee ?

MURDERER.

Because it is not done.

LEICESTER.

Not done !

Did courage fail thee at the last ?

MURDERER.

Thou told'st me she would be alone.

LEICESTER.

She is !

MURDERER.

Thou liest !

LEICESTER.

I lie ?

Whom didst thou see with her ?

MURDERER.

A man.

LEICESTER.

Nay !

MURDERER.

A man, I say.

LEICESTER.

Great God!

And is she false to me? Yea, she shall die,  
Though I must do the deed myself. Come, friend,  
We'll kill them both in their adultery. (*Aside*)  
I'm glad on this, for I've a deeper cause  
Why she should die.

MURDERER.

I will not come with thee.

LEICESTER.

Why, coward?

Hast thou not pluck enough to meet a man?

MURDERER.

I've pluck enough to meet a man, but not  
An army of them.

LEICESTER.

An army?

Pray, speak in simpler words, my friend. (*Aside*)  
I fear some plot against my life.

MURDERER.

In short, 'tis this:

As I approached, a dozen horsemen reached

*Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester* 171

The house, demanding in our sovereign's name  
Admittance. The door was oped, and in they  
walked.

They stayed inside a grievous time. At last  
They ushered forth, but with thy screaming wife,  
With whom they quickly rode away.

LEICESTER.

Is that thy tale ?

MURDERER.

It briefly pictures what I saw.

LEICESTER.

It is a mystery  
I cannot solve. Didst hear no words by which  
Thou couldst detect their errand ?

MURDERER.

No word was uttered.

LEICESTER.

I'd give my life  
If I could know these men.

MURDERER.

Methinks thou never wilt.

*[Exeunt both.]*

SCENE III.—*A street in London.*

*Enter FÉNELON and LINCOLN.*

FÉNELON.

We have his wife, I say,  
And surer evidence thou couldst not get.

LINCOLN.

When wilt thou tell the queen  
He hath a living wife?

FÉNELON.

Depend on it,  
I'll choose a time quite suitable.

LINCOLN.

I would the secret were not kept from her  
For many hours.

FÉNELON.

It shall not, rest assured.

LINCOLN.

O Leicester, thy great fall is near!

FÉNELON.

'Twill crush him past all recognising him.

LINCOLN.

Nay, can he fall from such a height and live ?

FÉNELON.

He hath much life in him.

[*Exeunt both.*]

SCENE IV.—*An apartment in the Palace. Enter*  
LADY SHEFFIELD *and* FRANCES HOWARD.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

A storm indeed ! ha ! ha !

There'll be the greatest storm these walls have  
heard.

Oh, how her majesty will rave at him !

FRANCES HOWARD.

Poor Leicester !

LADY SHEFFIELD.

And dost thou pity him ?

FRANCES HOWARD.

Did I not smile in uttering it ? Indeed,  
I've scarcely known a happier day.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

And yet thou lov'st him !

FRANCES HOWARD.

And thou art jealous of his wife. It is  
Her punishment that pleases thee.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Yet I have never done what thou hast done.

FRANCES HOWARD.

I've never stooped as thou hast stooped. I've  
held  
My head above my knees, indeed.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

'Twas but to let him see thy glassy eyes.

FRANCES HOWARD.

If thou hadst shown him thine he would have  
scorned  
So vile an imitation.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

I've heard him laugh at thee.

FRANCES HOWARD.

Because I pleased my lord. When thou cam'st  
near,  
His happy look did change to grief.

LADY SHEFFIELD.

Thou art a saucy wench.

FRANCES HOWARD.

And thou a fiery one.

*[Exeunt the two ladies.]*

*Enter ELIZABETH and SIR CHARLES HATTON.*

ELIZABETH.

'Tis jealousy disturbing thee again.  
Some men are overheated with strong wine,  
But envy hath inflamed thy heart and mind,  
And made thee use these incoherent words.

HATTON.

Nay, madam, thou dost wrongly rate me thus.  
By heaven! thou dost. My head's as cool as  
thine.

I will confess my heart is warm; nay, that  
It is inflamed. I'll swear by Holy Writ  
It is not jealousy that heats it thus.

'Tis love for thee; yea, truest love, sweet lady—  
No counterfeit, by all that's true. 'Tis love  
That longs for thy great joy and happiness.

ELIZABETH.

Then, rest assured I am a happy queen.

HATTON.

Thou art not ; nay, thou canst not be.

ELIZABETH.

What hinders it ?

HATTON.

Thou'lt say I'm envious if I tell it thee.

ELIZABETH.

I bid thee speak.

HATTON.

Thou hast deep love for him who scorns thee.

ELIZABETH.

And who is he ?

HATTON.

Nay, wilt thou ask ?

ELIZABETH.

Have I not asked ?

HATTON.

Thou lovest Leicester, who's not worthy thee.

ELIZABETH.

Who says I love him ? Have I said myself ?

HATTON.

Thou hast not, lady, but thy acts express  
Deep love for him.

ELIZABETH.

It is thy wilful misinterpretation.

HATTON.

Not mine alone, sweet lady ; others have  
Observed, and marked them too, with meaning  
    nods.  
And wilt thou say they misinterpret thee ?

ELIZABETH.

                                    Who are these men  
Who watch me thus ? By God ! I'll make them  
    spies !

HATTON.

They are not spies. They cannot shut their  
    eyes  
To what is done before them. They must see,  
Or else be wilful blind.

ELIZABETH.

                                    I say,  
They make it their one aim in life to mark  
My acts, to spy me out. I know them well.

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Dost think I have not marked their frowns and  
seen  
Their scornful smiles? God's death! I'll see  
their tears  
Ere long. Another pastime they shall have,  
But not where sunshine comes.

HATTON.

It is their duty, madam.  
It proves their faithfulness.

ELIZABETH.

What!

Dost take me for a dolt? This is no sign  
Of love, my friend. Thou canst not flatter me  
With such sweet words. I know ambition's ways.  
It is a quality that plots and schemes.  
Thou canst not teach me what it loves.

HATTON.

Ambition that doth plot to serve its queen,  
And to preserve herself and throne from those  
Who seek to ruin them, doth seem to me  
A worthy spectacle. The greatest nation  
Is that where such ambition is.

ELIZABETH.

Thou speakest truthfully,  
But that ambition which doth strive—nor minds

The means—to raise itself, and doth regard  
With jealous eye the height which others have  
Attained, will, if not checked at first, do harm.  
'Tis that which hath destroyed the greatest  
nations,  
Though they were built upon unselfishness  
At first. Yea, I must cure such jealousy.  
I'll have no weeds where flowers may grow.

HATTON.

Pray, pardon me.  
Thou dost not doubt my love ?

ELIZABETH.

Well, crush this jealousy, or else I'll look  
On thee as one who loves thyself with strength  
That doth not suit humility.

[*Exit* HATTON.

Go, feeble man,  
And tempt me not. Oh, God! why am I plagued  
With such weak-minded men ? Is it a curse  
Pronounced against unwedded life ? 'Tis they  
Who are to blame for my unmarried state.  
'Tis they who've been the shadows of my life,  
The threat'ning clouds which have obscured the  
sun,  
And made my path a dull, uncertain one.  
Where'er I go their faces haunt me ; yea,

180 *Queen Elizabeth and Earl Leicester*

With ugly menace, too. They're cowards all.  
They know a king would fill their hearts with fear,  
And so they'd have me be their humble queen.  
I'll show them yet I can put on the man.  
I'll make them quake. God's blood ! I'll let them  
know

No feeble woman governs them.

[*Exit ELIZABETH.*

*Enter SUSSEX and BURLEIGH.*

SUSSEX.

I pity him.

Her anger will demand his instant death.  
The blow will be so sudden and so strange  
That it will crush all womanly tenderness,  
And make her heart a stone. She'll look on him  
As on a monster worthy scorn and hate.  
And this will last for days and weeks, until  
She doth regain her womanliness and show  
Repentance and remorse. She then will grieve  
O'er Leicester's death, and be the constant prey  
Of melancholy. Burleigh, we must save  
Our blessed queen. She must not do the deeds  
Of sudden madness, and suffer the remorse  
Of sanity regained. Nor do I long  
For Leicester's death ; I bear him no ill will  
Of deadly quality. His game is o'er ;

His power is crushed. Henceforth he'll be too  
weak

To do our queen and country harm. With that  
I'll be content.

BURLEIGH.

I'd rather see him dead. Nor do I think  
The queen will suffer all the agony  
Thou hast depicted. But I long to know,  
Ere further words are said, what is the scheme  
Thou dost propose to save his head.

SUSSEX.

To use our influence and counsel her  
To stay the axe. To send him far away,  
On pain of putting him to death if he  
Return. 'Twill be a task, I must confess,  
Of subtlest delicacy and hazard, yet  
I'm sanguine of success.

BURLEIGH.

Thou'rt ever sanguine, Sussex; yea, too sanguine.  
I know of none so happy in his hopes  
Of sure success, yet it doth not have source  
In ever fruitfulness. I say, we should  
Incur the queen's displeasure if at such  
A time we tendered such advice. Yea, far  
From soothing her, as is thy wish, we would  
But add more fuel to the fire, in which

She'd also scorch us up. 'Twere wise of us  
To keep at distance safe, and let her fury  
Destroy the cause of it.

## SUSSEX.

This is no manly talk, my worthy lord.  
I know thou art not well, or else such words  
Would never leave thy lips. There is a duty  
We owe to her which should not dread her ire.  
I know thou wilt recall thy words, and thus  
I rest contented thou wilt come.

## BURLEIGH.

I've said what I intend. This man hath done  
Already grievous injury to me,  
And I were mad, indeed, to lift him up  
That he might strike at me again. Nay, nay.  
Count not on me to be his advocate.

## SUSSEX.

How can he injure thee again? He's down,  
To rise no more. He'll have no power to strike.  
Nay, Burleigh, this is no excuse. I say,  
Thy health hath much enfeebled thee. To-  
morrow  
Thou'lt be another man.

BURLEIGH.

I've said what I've resolved.

[*Exeunt both.*]

*Enter ELIZABETH with LEICESTER.*

ELIZABETH.

Thou hast thy enemies, but never fear,  
For I will be thy shield. To see thee fall  
Would give them thrilling joy. For them such  
joy  
Shall never be.

LEICESTER.

I thank thee, madam ;  
Such gracious words do fill my heart with hope.  
Thou art the staff on which I must depend  
For life ; yea, life, for if they had their wish  
I should not now be in thy queenly presence.

ELIZABETH.

I know it, Leicester.  
I know they wish thee dead ; but whilst I live  
Thou never need'st fear death from thy base foes.

LEICESTER.

Again I thank thee.  
Thou ever hast been wondrous kind to him  
Who is not worthy e'en to kneel to thee.

Thou art the only friend I have, sweet lady,  
 Yet thou art more than many. How I long  
 To pay in love and true allegiance  
 The debt I owe to thee! It is a debt  
 I cannot find fit language to express.  
 I ask thee, do I merit all their hate?  
 Would they regard me with such jealousy  
 If thou didst frown on me? Nay, nay! I'd be  
 A thing contemptible. I feel the brunt  
 Of their displeasure with thy gracious looks  
 And words. Thy graciousness to me hath bred  
 This hatred in their jealous hearts. If they  
 Regard me with this evil eye, they must  
 Assume their fond regards for thee.

ELIZABETH.

I know it.

'Tis all hypocrisy. They hate me too.  
 Yea, I have searched their faithless hearts ere  
     now,  
 And seen the falseness there. Thank God, I  
     know  
 A certain cure for this, which I'll apply  
 Ere many days are o'er.

LEICESTER.

'Twould be most wise.  
 Delay might make the evil past all cure.

I know they've tried to poison thee with lies  
That I have likewise been a faithless subject,  
And I have spent most grievous, painful hours  
In thinking that to thee their words might bear  
The stamp of truth. Yet with great joy I've  
seen

That thou hast read their hearts aright, and hast  
Displayed the wisdom which a loving God  
Hath blessed thee with. I've heard of foolish  
queens

Who have been led astray by hypocrites  
And flatterers, who did disguise their hate  
With the attractive garb of love. But thou  
Hast vision which can pierce all falsehood's guise,  
However skilfully it be portrayed.  
That is the source of thy prosperity,  
Which none before thee ever knew.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, Leicester, thou didst ever think too well  
Of me. I am not worthy of such praise.  
I have some gifts, I know, but not so great  
As thou dost say I frequently display.  
I've been deceived e'er now.

LEICESTER.

But not for long, sweet lady ; thou hast found  
Thy error out before great harm was done.

Canst thou or anyone look round and mark  
 The evidence of any foolish act ?  
 Can they point finger at the least defect,  
 And say, ' If she had had a keener eye,  
 Or deeper mind, this never would have been ' ?  
 Nay, lady. That's the sum and evidence  
 Of all true wisdom and of intellect,  
 Which thou hast got in perfect measure.

ELIZABETH.

I must not let thee prattle on so fast,  
 Or else thou'lt make me out divine.

LEICESTER.

Thou art.

I oftentimes think in my most serious moments  
 That God hath sent thee down from heaven to us  
 To rule the country which He loves, that He  
 Might thus reward its faith. Thou art so perfect,  
 Thou scarcely seemest human.

ELIZABETH.

Alas ! I would I were less human.

LEICESTER.

I'm glad thou'rt not, indeed.  
 It is a blessing for this mighty land.  
 Thou'lt pardon me—for it will show I have

A human weakness—hast thou ever had  
A doubt of my allegiance to thee ?

ELIZABETH.

Nay, never, Leicester ;  
No thought of that e'er grieved my heart. Why  
dost  
Thou question it ?

LEICESTER.

I know not, lady,  
Except it was to hear from thy sweet lips  
That thou dost still have trust in me.

ELIZABETH.

Then, be assured I have and will until——

LEICESTER.

Until——

ELIZABETH.

Thou dost deceive me.

LEICESTER.

Deceive thee !  
Dost think I ever could ?

ELIZABETH.

'Tis possible.

LEICESTER.

Nay, lady, never.

I'd leave my country first.

ELIZABETH.

Pray God thou never wilt.

LEICESTER.

Amen !

*[Exeunt both.]*

SCENE V.—*Outside the Palace.*

*Enter TWO GENTLEMEN, meeting.*

1ST GENT.

Good-morrow, friend.

2ND GENT.

Good-morrow, my good sir.

1ST GENT.

It is a pleasant morn.

2ND GENT.

To some ; to one it is a woful morn.

Thou knowest what has happened, friend ?

1ST GENT.

Nay, who can tell ?

Storms come so suddenly upon us now,  
That never have we cause to boast of times  
Of sunshine, which oft disappears e'en whilst  
We're praising it. So how can anyone  
Boast knowledge of events ?

2ND GENT.

But one event has happened, friend, which is  
The topic of all serious talk. Thou sure  
Hast heard of it ?

1ST GENT.

But she hath thrown a lover off ere now.  
Why take this latest freak so seriously ?

2ND GENT.

I see thou hast not learnt the newest thing.  
I must enlighten thee. Wouldst ever dream  
That Leicester had a wife ?

1ST GENT.

Nay, friend.

Restraint so great would ne'er exhaust his lust.  
A dozen wives would make him virtuous.

2ND GENT.

But he is really wed.

1ST GENT.

By parson ?

2ND GENT.

By church and ring.

1ST GENT.

It cannot be.

2ND GENT.

And, pray, why not ?

1ST GENT.

The church would fall on him.

2ND GENT.

It hath not, friend.

1ST GENT.

Then he's not married.

2ND GENT.

I tell thee that he is,

And I have seen his wife—I mean the queen  
Hath looked on her.

1ST GENT.

How hath she punished her ?

2ND GENT.

She's imprisoned in the Tower.

1ST GENT.

Her true deserts.

2ND GENT.

Thou hast a cruel heart.

1ST GENT.

I have no sympathy for those true fools  
Who worship such a man. A child could read  
His lying, vain, and vicious heart.

2ND GENT.

The world will never see him more.

1ST GENT.

Methinks it will.

2ND GENT.

The queen will not o'erlook the deed.

1ST GENT.

Who knows her mind?  
What skill can read her changing heart?

*[Exeunt both.]*

SCENE VI.—*An apartment in the Palace.*

*Enter the QUEEN and LEICESTER.*

ELIZABETH.

Plead not with me, I say.  
What canst thou urge t'excuse a trait'rous heart?  
What words can blot away the hideous stain  
On thy false heart? Thou art as black as hell  
Is hot, thou perjured hypocrite!

LEICESTER.

When I am dead  
Thou wilt repent these words.

ELIZABETH.

Repent them, traitor!  
Dost thou repent thy lies?

LEICESTER.

I do repent them, lady;  
But thou wilt pay no heed to what I say.

ELIZABETH.

No heed! God's death!  
Dost think I'd heed thy falsehoods now? Alas!  
I do repent I ever heeded them.

Oh, how this man hath made me his scorned  
tool !

How he hath mocked, and laughed, and jeered  
at me

From that proud height to which I mounted  
him !

The love he did pretend for me was hate ;

And I put faith in all his boasted lies !

Ha, fiend ! I have thee now ! Thou'rt safe !  
by God,

Thou shalt not keep thy wicked head !

LEICESTER.

Why dost thou tie my tongue ?

ELIZABETH.

Oh, would that I had silenced it ere now !

I would have saved myself this cruel grief !

I would have heard less lies ! This palace would

Have been a purer place ! I say, thou hast

Polluted it with thy foul breath. To think

That I have breathed the air which thou hast  
breathed !

O God, why didst Thou send this scourge to me,

This scorpion, to sting my life ? I'll rid

The world of it, that it may never know  
The pain of its foul sting again.

*Enter BURLEIGH and HATTON, who listen at a distance.*

LEICESTER.

Thou art unjust to me.  
I thought thou wert a fairer queen.

ELIZABETH.

Unjust to thee !  
Hast thou been just or fair to me ? Dost thou  
Deserve for all thy crimes, for all the deeds  
Of sin that thou hast done, a lenient  
And pitying regard ? Yea, yea, thou dost !  
Thy cowardliness doth seek for pity from  
The heart it bruised. Thou art a perfect coward,  
As thou art perfect in hypocrisy.  
The coward hath a loud and pleading tongue,  
But bravery a silent, pleading heart.  
Oh, why was I so blind as not to see  
Thou didst disguise thyself in bravery's garb !

LEICESTER.

How can I soften thee ?

*Others come in and stand at a distance.*

ELIZABETH.

Thou never wilt.

Nay, kneeling will more harden me. I'm proof  
Against all supplicating postures, which  
Doth evidence thou art an arrant cur.

LEICESTER.

I know thou'lt not forgive me, lady ; all  
I ask is that I may retain my head.  
I would die whole. I cannot live for long  
If banished from thy face. In solitude,  
And far from thee, I'd be as one that's dead,  
Which is thy wish.

ELIZABETH.

Nay, nay ;

I'll be convinced thou'rt dead. I'll see thy corpse  
And ease my mind. Thou'rt not the man to  
hide

In solitude. Thou wouldst conspire against  
My life, wouldst plot and scheme to seek revenge.  
I know thy cowardly heart. If when I smiled  
On thee thou didst thy best to injure me,  
How wouldst thou harm me when I frown on  
thee !

I've trusted thee too long. I do repent  
I e'er put faith in thee.

LEICESTER.

Oh, canst thou not be merciful ?

ELIZABETH.

Go, wretch,

And let me gaze on thee no more.

LEICESTER.

Nay, but one word.

ELIZABETH.

Go !

Or 'twill be worse for thee.

LEICESTER.

Alas !

Thou knowest not thou art thyself to blame.

If thou——

(ELIZABETH, *in a tempest of wrath, leaves him. The curtain falls on LEICESTER'S discomfiture and prostration.*)



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